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In Cooperation with J. CARNEY, J. J. HOGAN, *and* N. G. HOLMER
Edited by
S. B. LILJEGREN

V

Ibsen and the Beginnings of Anglo-Irish Drama

II. Edward Martyn

By

JAN SETTERQUIST

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IBSEN AND THE BEGINNINGS OF ANGLO-IRISH DRAMA

II. EDWARD MARTYN

INAUGURAL DISSERTATION

By

JAN SETTERQUIST
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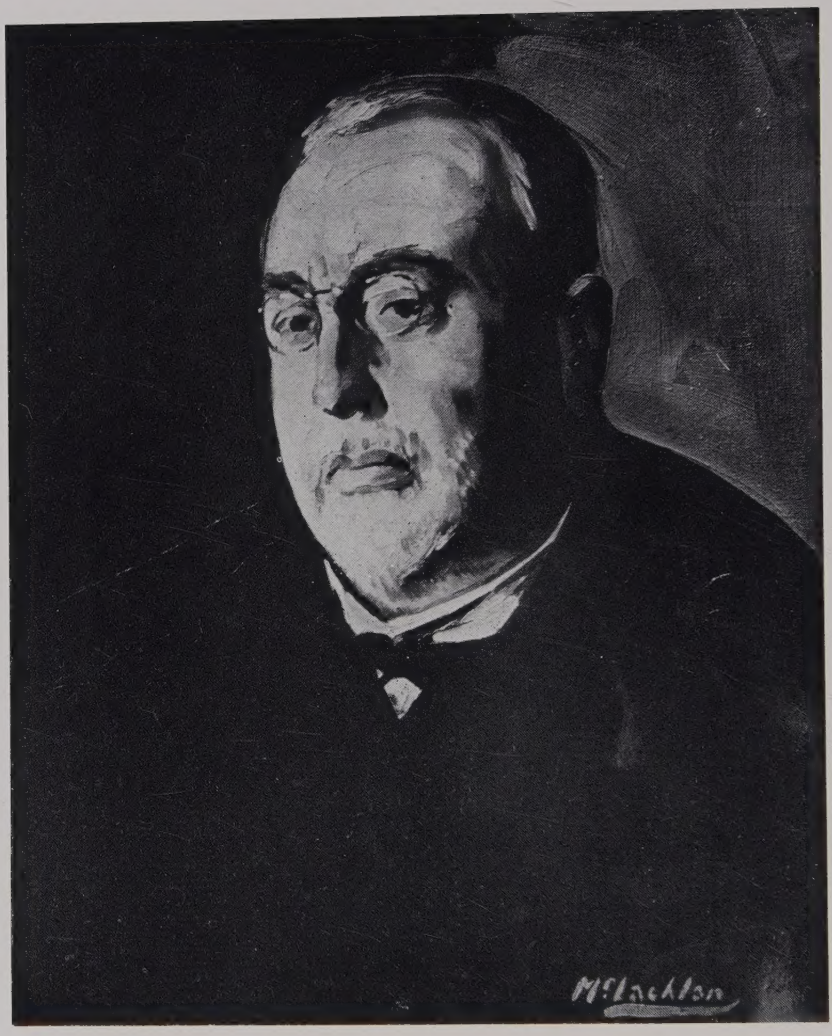
Ibsen and the Beginnings of Anglo-Irish Drama

II. Edward Martyn



EDWARD MARTYN

from the portrait by N. French McLachlan in the National Gallery of Ireland.

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TO

MY MOTHER

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Preface

My interest in Edward Martyn was aroused while I was still at work on the first part of the present study, dealing with Ibsen and J. M. Synge. I found that it was practically impossible to study any phase of the early history of the Irish Literary Renaissance without noticing the prominent position held by the author of *The Heather Field* and *Maeve*. A co-founder of the movement that subsequently led to the establishment of the Abbey Theatre, Edward Martyn spent much time and a considerable amount of money on the promotion of the fine arts, including music and the theatre.

Throughout his literary career the Irish dramatist acted as a living link between his own country and the Continent, seizing every opportunity to present foreign masterpieces upon the Irish stage, and urging his fellow-countrymen to study the works of Henrik Ibsen, whom he looked upon as the great innovator of the modern drama.

The immediate success of Martyn's first play, *The Heather Field*, with its Ibsenian group of characters, seemed to confirm his view that the Irish drama might be enriched from abroad. But before long he met with stubborn opposition from almost every quarter. With the passing of the years Martyn became an isolated man who had to cope with endless difficulties for carrying out his plans. Yet he refused to give in. Finally, towards the end of his life, he had the grim satisfaction of seeing the Abbey Theatre and the newly-formed Dublin Drama League engage upon the mutual task of staging the works of the famous continental playwrigths that he himself had tried to introduce some twenty years earlier.

By opposing the Yeatsian art shibboleth with its attack upon "the drama of Society", and by sponsoring Ibsen and the continental drama, Martyn secured a permanent place in the history of the Irish Dramatic Movement, a place he would never have occupied had he been content to dance attendance on Yeats and his followers.

Edward Martyn's indebtedness to Ibsen has been hinted at by many critics. But no attempt has as yet been made to give a full account of the close relationship that exists between the Irish dramatist and his Norwegian forerunner.

As in the case of J. M. Synge, I was put on the track by my teacher, Professor S. B. Liljegren, the pioneer in the field of Irish literary studies in this country. I am indebted to him for the subject of the present study which aroused my interest in the great writers of the Irish Literary Renaissance. I wish to express my deep gratitude to Professor Liljegren, not only for his generosity in allowing me to draw on the great resources of his scholarship, but also for the vivid interest he has taken in the progress of my work which owes so much to his encouragement and inspiration.

The aim of the present study is to give a detailed analysis of the various aspects, such as themes, character drawing and technique, that connect Martyn's plays with the Ibsenian theatre. In dealing with the subject I have selected those of the Irishman's published plays in which the foreign influence comes most clearly to the fore. This is the reason why I have chosen to neglect *The Dream Physician*, the action of which is as fantastic as its title. The whole play reads like a deliberate sneer at the lofty dreams and high-strung idealism of some of the author's earlier dramas. For the same reason I have also ignored two one-actors, *The Place-Hunters*, which is only a companion piece of *The Tale of a Town*, and *Romulus and Remus* which is, perhaps, best characterized by its sub-title "a symbolical extravaganza".

Several scholars have helped and encouraged me in the course of my researches. I am particularly indebted to Professor H. W. Donner under whose supervision this thesis was completed. I have benefited from his guidance in many ways and I am grateful to him for spending much time and wisdom on the manuscript of this book. I am also greatly in the debt of Professor Erik Tengstrand who kindly read an early version of some of my chapters and offered valuable suggestions. My sincere thanks are also directed to Professor J. J. Hogan who took an early interest in my studies and has continued to encourage me in many ways. I wish to pay a special tribute to Dr. Birgit Bramsbäck of the Department of English in Upsala University. Her expert criticism of various

aspects of my book as well as her never-failing interest in my Irish studies have placed me under an obligation which I am happy to acknowledge.

My most cordial thanks are due to Professor Stephen P. Ryan, New Orleans, not only for valuable information about Edward Martyn's manuscript plays but also for his kindness in sending me photostats of some little known Martyn material. I also wish to express my gratitude to Dr. T. P. O'Neill, Dublin, for much useful advice; and to Dr. Thomas McGreevy, Dublin, for friendly encouragement and help.

My sincere thanks go to the staffs of Upsala University Library, the National Library, Dublin, and Olso University Library, who have given full co-operation.

Let me record here, finally, my indebtedness to my wife who in so many ways—and not least in bearing with an overdose of 'Ibsen' in our daily conversation—helped and encouraged me to finish this book.

J. S.

Introduction

One of the most fascinating characters in George Moore's famous auto-biography, '*Hail and Farewell!*', is "dear Edward". Thus the author calls his friend and controversialist Edward Martyn who is the subject, on some immortal pages, of a rather malicious, yet magnificent full-length portrait.

"In 1894," Moore writes in his vivid overture to *Ave*, "Edward Martyn and I were living in the Temple, I in a garret in King's Bench Walk, he in a garret in Pump Court. ... I used to go to Pump Court, sure of finding him seated in his high, canonical chair, sheltered by a screen, reading his book, his glass of grog beside him, his long clay pipe in his hand; and we used to talk literature and drama until two or three in the morning."[1]

Later on, when Edward Martyn was occupying two rooms in Lincoln Place, Dublin, George Moore was in the habit of serenading his friend in the evening from the pavement. The following memorable scene is taken from *Salve* and gives an almost physical impression of the inveterate bachelor in his chaotic study:

"I began to look out for the light above the tobacconist's shop. The light was there! My heart was as faint as a lover's, and the serenade which I used to beguile him down from his books rose to my lips. He will only answer to this one, or to a motive from *The Ring*. And it is necessary to whistle very loudly, for the trams make a great deal of noise, and Edward sometimes dozes on the sofa.

On the other side is a public-house, and the serenading of Edward draws comments from the topers as they go away wiping their mouths. One has to choose a quiet moment between the trams; and when the serenade has been whistled twice, the light of Edward's candle appears, coming very slowly down the stairs, and there he is in the doorway, if anything larger than life, in the voluminous grey trousers, and over his shoulders a buff jacket

[1] *Ave* (London 1947), p. 1.

which he wears in the evening. Two short flights of stairs, and we are in his room. It never changes—the same litter from day to day, from year to year, the same old and broken mahogany furniture, the same musty wall-paper, dusty manuscripts lying about in heaps, and many dusty books. If one likes a man one likes his habits, and never do I go into Edward's room without admiring the old prints that he tacks on the wall, or looking through the books on the great round table, or admiring the little sofa between the round table and the Japanese screen, which Edward bought for a few shillings down on the quays—a torn, dusty, ragged screen, but serviceable enough; it keeps out the draught; and Edward is especially susceptible to draughts, the very slightest will give him a cold. Between the folds of the screen we find a small harmonium of about three octaves, and on it a score of Palestrina. As well might one try to play the Mass upon the flute, and one can only think that it serves to give the keynote to a choir-boy. On the table is a candlestick made out of white tin, designed probably by Edward himself, for it holds four candles. He prefers candles for reading, but he snuffs them when I enter and lights the gas, offers me a cigar, refills his churchwarden, and closes his book."[1]

There is, in *Ave*, another famous passage in which Moore satirizes "dear Edward's" avowed muddle-headedness: "He is like Ireland, the country he came from; sometimes a muddling fog, sometimes a delicious mist with a ray of light striking through; and that is why he is the most delightful of travelling companions. One comes very soon to the end of a mind that thinks clearly, but one never comes to the end of Edward."[2]

In a final outburst, towards the end of *Vale*, Moore sums up what might well be called one of the strangest friendships in the history of literature: "There is no doubt that I owe a great deal of my happiness to Edward; all my life long he has been exquisite entertainment."[3] In a typical allusion to the iniquity of Nature,

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[1] *Salve* (London 1947), pp. 128–129. Cf. the following passage: "Edward is all right if he gets his Mass in the morning and his pipe in the evening. A great bulk of peasantry with a delicious strain of Palestrina running through it." (*Ibid.*, p. 95.)

[2] *Ave*, p. 134.

[3] *Vale* (London 1947), p. 191.

Moore goes on to say: "And I fell to thinking that Nature was very cruel to have led me, like Moses, within sight of the Promised Land. A story would be necessary to bring Edward into literature, and it would be impossible to devise an action of which he should be a part. The sex of a woman is odious to him, and a man with two thousand a year does not rob nor steal, and he is so uninterested in his fellow-men that he has never an ill word to say about anybody. John Eglinton is a little thing; Æ is a soul that few will understand; but Edward is universal—more universal than Yeats, than myself, than any of us, but for lack of a story I shall not be able to give him the immortality which he seeks in sacraments. ... As I understand him he is a temperament without a rudder; all he has to rely upon is his memory, which isn't a very good one, and so he tumbles from one mistake into another. My God! it is a terrible thing to happen to one, to understand a man better than he understands himself, and to be powerless to help him."[1]

From the above quotations which, incidentally, will help us to understand certain aspects of Martyn's drama, it is obvious that George Moore looked upon his friend as his own Sancho Panza. Edward Martyn, on the other hand, lost no time in retorting that Moore had "constituted himself my Boswell". The forbearing playwright was, however, sufficiently provoked to score off George Moore in his satirical play *The Dream Physician* where the tactless biographer, in the obvious disguise of George Augustus Moon, becomes the laughing-stock of everybody.

Now, in spite of the many unforgettable glimpses of Edward Martyn as he appears in '*Hail and Farewell!*', any reader of the memoirs can see with half an eye that the portrait remains a torso in so far as there is practically no account of Martyn's remarkable achievement in the history of Ireland's Literary Renaissance. Besides, whatever information there is, it is almost invariably supplied with a view to making the playwright appear in a comic light.

Edward Martyn's dates are 1859–1923. His father, John Martyn of Tulira Castle, was one of the leading landlords of County Galway. He appears to have been a descendant of the Crusader, Oliver Martin, who landed in Ireland with Strongbow. John Martyn

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[1] *Vale*, pp. 191–192.

married the daughter of a well-to-do business man who belonged to the peasant class. Two sons, Edward and John, were born in this marriage. Both boys were quite small when they lost their father. Edward Martyn's brother died young and he himself "was to grow up profoundly conscious of his own isolated position as the last survivor of the Martyn family in the county which had once been full of them".[1] Mrs. Martyn had but one ambition. She wanted her son to make a fine career ending up with a suitable marriage. So she sent him to Oxford. She also allowed him to see as much of Europe as he pleased, hoping that one day he would occupy his father's position as one of the principal landlords of the county. Above all she kept planning for his marriage. She refused to accept what other people felt instinctively, that her son was not a marrying man. Yeats, who knew him well, says that "he shrank from women like a medieval monk," adding that "with him died a family founded in the twelfth century. An unhappy, childless, unfinished, laborious man, typical of an Ireland that is passing away."[2] True, no doubt, but hardly the whole truth.

By way of introduction and as a striking contrast not only to Yeats' lament for his dead friend, but also to George Moore's brilliant, though highly prejudiced, portrait of Edward Martyn, one is almost bound to quote the opening lines of Professor Denis Gwynn's remarkable study of the man and the period. "No other Irishman," he writes, "in the various movements which together may be generally described as the 'Irish Revival'—between the eighteen-nineties and the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1921—occupies the same prominent place as Edward Martyn as a connecting link between so many intellectual activities. He was in the peculiar position of being the only Irishman with large private means who was in full sympathy with almost every phase of the Irish Revival. ... But he was much more than the source of money which was indispensable for each new enterprise. He had already made a reputation among men of letters when Mr. W. B. Yeats was beginning to be known as a poet; and it was he who introduced Mr. Yeats to both Mr. George Moore and to Lady Gregory, and obtained their collaboration with him in founding the Irish Literary

[1] Denis Gwynn, *Edward Martyn and the Irish Revival* (London 1930), p. 43.

[2] W. B. Yeats, *The Bounty of Sweden* (Dublin 1925), p. 52.

Theatre which afterwards developed into the Abbey Theatre. It was Edward Martyn who not only provided the money with which the first group of actors were got together, but who also wrote the first play which attracted favourable attention when it was acted in Dublin, and so made the subsequent development possible."[1]

It is part of the tragedy of Martyn's life that this development proved contrary to his own artistic credo as expressed in the famous manifesto that Yeats, supported by Martyn and Moore, issued in 1899 in the first number of *Beltaine*, the official organ of the Irish Literary Theatre. "Norway," it is solemnly announced, "has a great and successful school of contemporary drama, which grew out of a national literary movement very similar to that now going on in Ireland. Everywhere critics and writers, who wish for something better than the ordinary play of commerce, turn to Norway for an example and an inspiration."[2] The pioneering work of the Théâtre Libre and the Independent Theatre is hailed with satisfaction as well as such inexpensive theatres "which associations of men of letters hire from time to time that they may see upon the stage the plays of Henrik Ibsen, Maurice Maeterlink, Gerard Hauptmann, Jose Echegeray, or some less famous dramatist who has written, in the only way literature can be written, to express a dream which has taken possession of his mind."[3]

Now, even if the manifesto seemed to strike a rather cosmopolitan note, it would soon be evident that the apparent identity of purpose of the three collaborators was merely illusory. The main difference might be described as a clash between national and cosmopolitan ideals. Yeats, as well as Lady Gregory, took a real interest in Irish folk-lore, both finding inspiration in the life of the peasantry. They soon became absorbed by the mutual task of presenting to the Irish Theatre the kind of folk drama, coupled with plays of legend and history, which they considered should form the repertory to the exclusion of practically all other forms of drama.[4] "Our movement,"

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[1] Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 13. [2] *Beltaine*, May 1899, p. 6.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 6. Yeats' spelling of the names has been left unchanged.

[4] Yeats, it is true, was later to go back on his own principles. Thus, in 1919, he was forced to admit that the scope of the Abbey had been too narrow. By forming the Dublin Drama League with a view to producing famous continental plays, Yeats did tardy justice to the original project of his partners in 1899.

Yeats wrote in 1902, in an article in the review *Samhain*, "is a return to the people, and the drama of Society would but magnify a condition of life which the countryman and the artisan could but copy to their hurt. The play that is to give them a quite natural pleasure should either tell them of their own life, or of that life of poetry where every man can see his own image, because then alone does human nature escape from arbitrary conditions."[1]

Such a programme could hardly conform to that of Martyn and Moore who were both well versed in contemporary drama and only too eager to stimulate the production in Ireland of the kind of cosmopolitan drama of ideas which they had come to know and admire during their stay in London. No other member of the Irish dramatic movement had such a first-hand knowledge of the growth on the Continent of the 'independent' theatre as Edward Martyn. According to Malone, he "had known the Théâtre Libre in Paris, the Freie Bühne in Berlin, and the Independent Theatre in London, following their work with the closest attention, as in these experimental theatres he saw the only hope for the literary drama."[2] In 1906 Martyn joined forces with Padraic Colum and other friends in launching a new project. It was called the Theatre of Ireland. The programme of the first night included Seumas O'Cuisin's play *The Racing Lug*, Douglas Hyde's *The Twisting of the Rope* and the fourth act of *Brand*. During the Ibsen Week of 1908 *A Doll's House*, *Hedda Gabler* and *The Master Builder* were performed at the Gaiety Theatre in Dublin by an English Company. "Practically no audience present, however in the front row of the pit stalls I noticed the faithful Ibsenite Edward Martyn—an eager & an appreciative spectator."[3]

Having founded a theatre of his own in 1914, Martyn was in a position to produce his own dramas as well as many new plays by some of his countrymen. But the repertory of the Irish Theatre, as the new venture was called, also included translations of continental masterpieces by Ibsen, Strindberg, Chekhov, Maeterlinck, and

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[1] *Samhain*, quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 137.

[2] Andrew E. Malone, *The Irish Drama* (London 1929), p. 66.

[3] Joseph Holloway's *A Dublin Playgoer's Impressions*, May 1908. (MS. 1812, p. 503. National Library of Ireland.) I am indebted to Dr. Birgit Bramsbäck for information on this point.

Galsworthy. Chekhov, by the way, was a great favourite with the Irish dramatist. Both writers looked upon the Northern master as the great pioneer for the theatre of poetic realism, the kind of inner drama that they themselves wanted to create. "The whole meaning and drama of man," Chekhov writes of *Uncle Vanya*, "is in internal and not in external phenomena."[1] Words that might equally well stand as a motto for what is best in Martyn's own dramatic writings.[2]

Although the Irish playwright was in sympathy with Yeats' new departure, a sympathy that bordered on self-effacement, he could not fail to notice that from now on the initiative had passed into the hands of Yeats. It is significant that the rapid disappearance from the stage of both Martyn and Moore was followed by the almost simultaneous rise of a new star, J. M. Synge, who soon brought the Irish drama to the peak of perfection.

Thus it happened that Martyn, for all his enthusiasm and generosity in advancing the ideals of "Irish Ireland", came to play a rather subordinate, though by no means unimportant part in the development of the Abbey Theatre.[3] In an unpublished essay, we find Martyn summing up his situation in words which give us the clue to his own failure as a playwright: "The dramatist," he writes, "who practises an art so fascinating to himself (i.e. literary and psychological drama) is at more disadvantage at present in Ireland than any other of his brethren. That is why, although I have written

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[1] B. H. Clark and G. Freedley, *A History of Modern Drama* (New York & London 1947), p. 413.

[2] It seems likely that certain aspects of Martyn's drama were inspired by the great Russian. Thus the dream-like atmosphere of *The Heather Field* and of *Maeve* recalls a sentence in the opening pages of *The Sea-Gull*. "One must depict life," Konstantin, the young author, declares, "not as it is, and not as it ought to be, but as we see it in our dreams." Definitely Chekhovian is the nostalgic mood of *Maeve* whose delicate heroine keeps yearning for the beautiful things that are passing. *Grangecolman* no doubt owes something to the author of *Uncle Vanya* and *The Cherry Orchard*. The hopeless atmosphere of the old manor and the failure of its lonely inhabitants to break their isolation by really listening to each other, all this is highly reminiscent of the Russian master.

[3] Martyn was later to refer to "the foundation of the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, which was the source of the whole modern Irish Dramatic Movement", as "the most significant action of my life". (Martyn papers, quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 164.)

more plays than anyone else, which are of course quite useless for commercial purposes, I so seldom get a chance of being produced. If I could have written capable peasant plays, which I could not because they do not interest me, in that the peasant's primitive mind is too crude for any sort of interesting complexity in treatment, I have no doubt I should have found my place naturally in the Abbey Theatre.[1] But I could not, and as the Abbey Theatre could not produce work like mine, which was obviously not suited to their powers (they acted during one week-end *The Heather Field* on the whole so unsatisfactorily that they never attempted it again), I naturally became an isolated figure, who had to depend on my own efforts with amateur players of varied efficiency for seeing my dramas on the stage. ... I produced some plays of Ibsen and of my own with varying results."[2]

On the other hand, Martyn was fortunate in having many friends who were willing, sometimes only too willing, to help him in his literary work. Suffice it to mention George Moore, W. B. Yeats and Arthur Symons to whom Martyn dedicated his first volume of plays. Moore, by the way, wrote an enthusiastic introduction to the book. At a much later date Yeats was to reveal that Moore "had constructed *The Heather Field*, he said, telling Martyn what was to go into every speech but writing nothing, had partly constructed *Maeve*."[3] Sometimes Moore's influence had the effect of a steam-roller, as in his re-writing of his friend's political satire *The Tale of a Town*. Yeats supplied Martyn with material for the legendary queen in *Maeve*.[4] At the same time both Yeats and Moore could be frightfully condescending to "dear Edward" as if they envied him the great success he had scored at the beginning of his career. Arthur Symons, the well-known symbolist, lent his exquisite pen to the final phrasing of many passages in *Maeve*, including the beautiful vision.[5] In this connection John MacDonagh should also

[1] Apparently Martyn had no very clear picture of the true nature of Yeats' drama, to say nothing of the possibilities of the "peasant play", to use his own contemptuous phrase, in the competent hands of Lady Gregory and, in due time, J. M. Synge.

[2] Martyn papers, quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, pp. 158–159.

[3] W. B. Yeats, *Dramatis Personae 1896–1902* (London 1936), p. 44.

[4] Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

be mentioned. Being both an actor and a dramatist, he played an important part as producer and director of Martyn's Irish Theatre.

The fact, however, that Martyn's original dream of founding a permanent Irish Literary Theatre had not materialized,[1] did not prevent him from carrying out similar theatrical experiments at a later date, ending up, as mentioned above, with the foundation of the Irish Theatre.

"What is my project then?" Martyn asks in the essay already referred to. "It is not original. It is simply to apply the methods of the Abbey Theatre to an organisation of the most talented amateurs for the encouragement by production of native Irish drama other than the peasant species and thereby see if by study and perseverance we may similarly create a bond of young dramatists who will devote themselves to this department of dramatic writing. I feel that however depressed and ruined we may have been by English government and our own inept acquiescence by often playing into the hands of the enemy, we have still some inhabitants left in Ireland besides peasants, and that a theatre which only treats of peasant life can never be considered, no matter how good it may be, more than a folk theatre. Consequently only partially representative of Ireland, it cannot be compared with those other national theatres in Europe which represent so thoroughly the minds of the various countries where they exist. ... Our plays, both native and translations of foreign masterpieces, shall be those not usually acted by professionals. We will also act plays, co-operating with the Gaelic League Players, in the Irish language, from which of course peasant subjects must not be excluded. Here they are fitting in every way. Above all, we will take the greatest pains, so that our performances may be intelligent and finished."[2]

The present investigation will take as its starting-point two of the principal aims of Martyn's new venture, namely the production of non-peasant plays by Irishmen as well as English translations of European masterpieces for the stage. Confining ourselves to Mar-

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[1] "Edward is sorry," Lady Gregory writes in her diary of September 25, 1921, "he didn't build a theatre twenty years ago, and 'put the key in his pocket.' " (*Lady Gregory's Journals 1916–1930*, edited by Lennox Robinson (Dublin 1946), p. 159.)

[2] Martyn papers, quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, pp. 161–162.

tyn's own achievement in the field of drama, we have already seen that he took a special interest in social and intellectual drama as opposed to folk drama.

In the early days of the Irish Revival both Martyn, Moore and Yeats were all united in a mutual effort to do for Ireland what Ibsen and Bjørnson had done for Norway. It is, however, worth noticing that of the three original partners only Martyn remained true, throughout his life, to the gallant slogan of 1899, already quoted above: "Everywhere critics and writers, who wish for something better than the ordinary play of commerce, turn to Norway for an example and an inspiration." Unlike Synge, who concealed his own indebtedness to Ibsen by making negative pronouncements on the Norwegian dramatist, Edward Martyn offers the unique picture of a playwright who does not hesitate to go to the other extreme. With the obvious exception of G. B. Shaw,[1] and, perhaps, James Joyce, it is hard to think of any other Irish author who paid the dues of discipleship more loyally than Edward Martyn.

The very frequency with which the name of the Norwegian forerunner recurs in Martyn's essays, as well as in other pronouncements by him, tells its own tale. No other writer occupies the same place as Ibsen in the papers and articles of the Irish playwright. Apart from some panegyrical declarations, which from time to time would escape him,[2] Martyn left not a few penetrating essays on the Norwegian dramatist and his writings.[3] Visual impressions of some early performances of Ibsen's plays[4] and a life-long study of his drama formed the natural background to Martyn's own literary activities. Having observed that preacher and poet kept struggling for the pen of his beloved master, the Irish playwright instinctively sided with the poet, paying less attention to Ibsen the social refor-

[1] Cf. especially *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (London 1913).

[2] E.g. "Certainly Ibsen is the most original as well as the greatest of dramatists." (Martyn papers, quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 144.)

[3] Selections from these essays appear in the present introduction *et passim*. Martyn also wrote stimulating reviews of Ibsen's plays. See for instance "The Recent Performance of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm*" in *The Irish Review*, February 1914.

[4] For a full account of English translations of Ibsen and the spread of his work in England, see Miriam A. Franc, *Ibsen in England*, Boston 1919, Appendices A–B.

mer, who was at that time eagerly discussed by the English public "when the stirring of the bones began in the late eighties".[1]

In one of his essays Martyn draws attention to the fine union of poetry and realism that characterizes Ibsen's prose dramas. "For the way with these wonderful plays," he writes, "where subtle mental poetry finds expression in the most direct realism of speech, as here (i.e. *Little Eyolf*) and in *Rosmersholm* and above all in *The Master Builder*, is to give the sensation of rare harmonies, to produce with their triumphant construction the effect of a symphony where idea grows naturally from idea, where dramatic effects are but the natural outcome of logical combinations of circumstances, where profound knowledge of the human heart and character is set down with such certainty of intellect as may be seen in the lines of a drawing by some great master."[2]

Martyn's analysis of Ibsen's works is no doubt advanced for its time and confirms the impression that the Irish dramatist was not only deeply interested in Ibsen; he had also a first-hand knowledge of his plays and a remarkable flair for the true significance and greatness of the Ibsenian drama.

[1] Una Ellis-Fermor, *The Irish Dramatic Movement* (London 1954), p. 5.

[2] Martyn papers, quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 142.

CHAPTER I

The Heather Field

Edward Martyn made his *début* as a dramatist in 1899, the very year in which Henrik Ibsen laid down his pen for ever. *The Heather Field* formed part of the opening programme of the Irish Literary Theatre and was first performed at the Antient Concert Rooms, Dublin, May 9, 1899. It was a greater success with the audience than Yeats' *The Countess Cathleen* which had been acted the night before.

The action of *The Heather Field* takes place about the year 1890 in Carden Tyrrell's house on the west coast of Ireland.

Plot

Act I

The scene represents Carden Tyrrell's library. At the back through open glass folding-doors a small garden is visible, below which the Atlantic Ocean, flanked by a mountain on the left, stretches out to the horizon.

Carden's younger brother, Miles, is seated at a writing-table. He is unable to concentrate upon his studies because of the estrangement that separates Carden and his wife, who have been married for ten years. Miles confides his trouble to their mutual friend, Barry Ussher, a wealthy landowner living in the neighbourhood. It turns out that Ussher had done his best to persuade Carden not to marry Grace, a beautiful but calculating young woman who only

cared for his money and his position. The power of her influence soon turned Carden, hitherto a charming and engaging man, into a mere shadow of his former self. The first sign of revolt, however, was when Carden took up his work in the heather field to whose reclamation he is prepared to sacrifice everything. Before long he has sunk a fortune in the barren mountain which he has set his mind to conquer. When he makes his first appearance in the play he is about to raise more money to meet the dangerous situation that has arisen as a result of the drainage of the heather field having practically swamped the lands below it. Ussher and Miles fail to persuade Carden to be more careful about the way he spends his fortune. But it is too late. The heather field has already become an obsession with Carden. Life seems to him nothing but a dream from which there is no awakening except in the great mountain field he is trying to bring to fruitfulness. Up in the mountain, followed only by his little son Kit, Carden is able to find himself again as he was in the old days before his fatal marriage. The presence of the boy quickens the magic of the heather field, for Kit happens to be very like his uncle Miles as he looked ten years before.

Faced with his wife, Carden is bound to meet with opposition. But resistance can only make him more determined to carry out his plans. Finally, his own wife declares that she believes him to be mad. The act closes on a bewildered Carden asking himself if there can possibly be a doubt as to which is the reality and which is the dream.

Act II

Grace Tyrrell has asked her neighbours, Lord and Lady Shrule, to lunch. Her husband, however, prefers to stay away in the heather field, busying himself with his great project. Lady Shrule, who really cares for Mrs. Tyrrell, is anxious to help her friend whose rash marriage has always puzzled her. Mrs. Tyrrell objects that Carden was a good match at the time. Besides she had always counted on ruling the roost because of Carden's infatuation about her. But as soon as Mrs. Tyrrell tried to centre Carden's interest too exclusively

upon herself, she suddenly became as nothing to him—what he loved was something mysterious, beyond her. According to Mrs. Tyrrell's friend, Carden never loved his wife. Lady Shrule goes so far as to intimate that the Tyrrells were always a queer lot. Carden's father was very eccentric and his mother went quite out of her mind before she died. This is news to Mrs. Tyrrell. It all comes in very handy, bringing grist to her mill. For she is now planning to prevent Carden from ruining his family. It appears that she is actually expecting two doctors who, upon the plea of holding a consultation about the little boy Kit, are going to form an opinion as to the mental state of her husband. Upon his return home, Carden, not taking alarm, informs the doctors of his plans for the reclaiming of waste land. It turns out to be a gigantic project leading up to the forming of a company for buying and reclaiming or reafforesting every inch of waste land in Ireland. The face of a whole country will soon be changed thanks to Carden's creative work. For the stubborn landowner, who cannot endure the dull drudgery of ordinary cultivation of the soil, had gone to great efforts in order to "idealize" farming, until, finally, there came to him the master-thought of the heather field. What really arouses the suspicion of the doctors is, however, Carden's dream philosophy, the voices on the mountain which call him back to his real life, i.e. the life he was leading before he wandered into the present dream. Carden then bids farewell to the company. His friend, Barry Ussher, is left with the delicate task of pleading his cause before the doctors. They eventually yield to his opinion and leave the house without giving Mrs. Tyrrell their final verdict as to her husband's reputed insanity. With suppressed anger Mrs. Tyrrell makes Carden's friend responsible for her failure. Mr. Ussher is, however, prepared to take the consequences. He asks Mrs. Tyrrell if she has considered her own responsibility. To "imprison" a man like Carden would practically mean his death. Mrs. Tyrrell replies that she must protect herself and her child. Hoping that his friend will never know about Mrs. Tyrrell's intrigues against him, Ussher implores her to be patient and gentle with Carden. For she might yet win him back. "It was too late," Mrs. Tyrrell retorts, "from the moment his thoughts first turned to the heather field."

Act III

Having been forced to evict his tenants because of their demands for far-reaching abatements on rents, Carden Tyrrell has become a prisoner on his own estate. He prefers to stay at home since he is no longer able to visit his domains without a police escort for fear of being shot at. Even his little son Kit, the elf of the heather field, fails to make his father stir from his hearth. The boy has just received a nice little pony from the kind-hearted Ussher and rides off to the heather field in order to find some wild flowers for his father. Follows a conversation between Carden and Ussher about the serious state of affairs. Ussher suggests to his friend, who has not taken part in the drainage of the valley for a long time, that they should both set out for a journey and leave everything behind them for a while. But Carden is not in a mood to surrender. As for the work, he stubbornly objects that he can direct it just as well from his room—like Moltke fighting battles from his study! Carden's most difficult task is not, however, to cope with his tenants, but to come to terms with pressing mortgagees. It turns out that he has just sent his brother Miles to the chief creditor asking him not to foreclose until Carden is able to let the heather field. Ussher does all in his power to persuade his friend to come to an agreement with his tenants. But Carden does not feel like complying with their demands, thereby reducing the value of his property. If the worst should come, he declares, I have always the great resource—the heather field! Ussher warns his friend not to pin his faith too exclusively upon a single resource. Besides, Carden is too much of a sportsman to be able to survive for long the dreadful state of affairs that has turned his own home into a prison. Somewhat later Miles brings bad news to his brother. The chief mortgagee has refused to wait any longer. Carden is, of course, paralysed by the blow. But it opens his eyes, if only for a moment. Then, suddenly, he clings to his old vision. "This vulture cannot touch the heather field! My hope—it is my only hope now, and it will save me in the end. Ha, ha! these wise ones! They did not think the barren mountain of those days worth naming in their deed. But now that mountain is a great green field worth more than they can seize, (*with a strange intensity*) and it is mine—all mine!"

Stirred to the bottom of his soul, Carden leaves the room only to run into his little son, bringing with him, not the wild flowers he had been looking for, but a handful of heather buds! And so, with the flowering of the Heather Field, Carden's soul is plunged for ever into the dark waters of madness. The struggle is over. Carden has at last found his lost youth. Everything that has been done in the past becomes undone. Carden's wife becomes Miss Desmond and Kit his brother Miles. The curtain closes on a man who stands as if transfigured, reasserting his idealism, for he has regained for ever the happy hunting grounds of his boyhood when his mind was serene and the world beautiful beyond words: "Oh, the rainbow! Come quick, see the lovely rainbow! Oh, mystic highway of man's speechless longings! My heart goes forth upon the rainbow to that horizon of joy! The voices—I hear them now triumphant in a silver glory of song!"

Theme

The central theme of *The Heather Field* is the fatal clash of dream and reality, of fact and fantasy. The hero of the play clings to his wild schemes with a tenacity that spells disaster. His ideal becomes an obsession, an *idée fixe*, and finally a mania. The conflict is presented in a manner which is clearly reminiscent of Ibsen's treatment of a similar subject in some of his most important plays, notably *The Wild Duck*.

Character

The main conflict of *The Heather Field* is revealed in the development of the protagonist of the drama, Carden Tyrrell. From the point of view of Ibsenian influence on Martyn a close study of the hero of his first play is most rewarding. Ever since he first conceived

the character of Brand, the Norwegian dramatist continued to produce variations of this particular psychological type, i.e. the uncompromising fanatic and moralist, so that in the end he left a whole gallery of dogmatists, idealists, dreamers, and visionaries. Moreover, the insistence upon the individual's loyalty to his calling is something of a *leitmotif* in Ibsen's works from the early days of *The Pretenders* and *Brand* down to his dramatic epilogue *When We Dead Awaken*. Dwelling for a moment on Brand, comparing him with Carden Tyrrell, we are bound to notice that there is a certain similarity in the very dilemma with which both are faced—the reconciliation of what they consider to be their mission to the demands of the family. Thus Brand is willing to sacrifice everything, his wife, his child, his social and financial position in obedience to his vocation. Martyn's hero, for all the difference in other respects, turns out to be equally absorbed by his inner vision. Opposition can only provoke his innate fanaticism. In pursuit of his ideal, Carden, like Brand, is ready to sacrifice both his family and his fortune. True, Carden does not love his wife any longer, but on the other hand he is deeply attached to his brother and above all to his little son Kit whom he adores.

This is not to argue that Carden Tyrrell is an Irish Brand. But Martyn's hero is clearly a descendant not only of Brand but of a whole group of Ibsenian fanatics, possessed with an *idée fixe*, often a desperate desire to carry out "the impossible". Like Ibsen's heroes, Carden is a dreamer of strange dreams, a man haunted by a vision that in the end turns out to be an illusion. Carden, like so many of Ibsen's heroes, is pursuing a dimly perceived ideal which can never be reconciled to stubborn fact and the demands of real life. Like Brand, like Rosmer, like Solness and Rubek, Carden is bound to sink under the burden. *L'amour de l'impossible* proves fatal to them all.

Among the works of Ibsen there is, however, one particular drama which must not be overlooked in this connection. And that is *The Wild Duck*. In this play, perhaps more than in any other, Ibsen is engaged on a penetrating analysis of the conflict between fact and fantasy, dream and reality. Some years earlier he had solemnly declared that truth and freedom were the *Pillars of Society*. In *An Enemy of the People*, which precedes *The Wild Duck*, Ibsen reinforced his statement. The plays that follow, however, represent

a new departure in the literary career of the Northern dramatist. As we shall see, one of the most interesting innovations of *The Wild Duck* is the subtle technique of the play. Before discussing this point, let us for a moment dwell upon the message of *The Wild Duck*. It is contrary to the lesson of the earlier plays. In a letter of June 1884 there is a significant hint at Ibsen's new attitude and the spirit that pervades *The Wild Duck:*

> "I gave up universal standards long ago, because I ceased believing in the justice of applying them. I believe that there is nothing else and nothing better for us all to do than in spirit and in truth to realise ourselves."[1]

And so *The Wild Duck* expresses Ibsen's new standpoint that the happiness of the average man is dependent on his being allowed to preserve his illusions. Already in *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*, it is true, Ibsen had dealt with certain aspects of the same problem. In these earlier plays, however, the great playwright was inclined to consider the conflict from a moral point of view, whereas in *The Wild Duck* the stress is mainly on the psychological aspects of the case. The study of Ibsen's hero, Hjalmar Ekdal, the photographer, exposes a typical day-dreamer who has carried the noble art of self-deception to such heights of perfection that a sudden disenchantment must necessarily spell disaster. The dream-world of Hjalmar Ekdal is primarily founded on his willed belief in himself as a clever inventor, who will soon be the talk of the town. "Ekdal's misfortune," says Dr. Relling, the commentator of the play, "is that in his own circle he has always been looked upon as a shining light."[2] When, through the gratuitous meddling of his old schoolfriend, Gregers Werle, the self-styled inventor is suddenly robbed of his belief in his own superiority, life becomes intolerable and tragedy is close at hand. To quote Dr. Relling once more: "Rob the average man of his life-illusion,[3] and you rob him of his happiness at the same stroke."[4]

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[1] Letter to Theodor Caspari, dated Rome, 27th June, 1884. *The Correspondence of Henrik Ibsen.* The translation edited by Mary Morison. (London 1905) p. 383.

[2] *The Wild Duck,* Act V, pp. 367–368. All references to Ibsen's plays are to *The Collected Works of Henrik Ibsen.* Entirely revised and edited by William Archer. Vols. I–XII. Heinemann, London 1906–1912.

[3] Lit. "the life-lie".

[4] *The Wild Duck,* Act V, p. 372.

If the reader of this brief analysis of *The Wild Duck* now turns to *The Heather Field*, it will be apparent, from the summary of the plot given above, that there is a definite similarity between the two plays, as regards both subject-matter and character drawing. In the first place both Hjalmar Ekdal and Carden Tyrrell have an innate tendency of talking themselves into believing in the future success of their own fanciful projects. They readily indulge in day-dreams that will never materialize. Mrs. Tyrrell's sneer at her husband: "You imagine yourself the busiest man in the world; and as a matter of fact you have nothing to do"[1] reads like a perfect characterization of Ibsen's self-styled inventor who lies on his sofa all day, inventing nothing except pretexts for doing nothing. When the despotism of reality becomes intolerable, both men take refuge in their respective castles in Spain. Ibsen's hero has a passion for idealizing life in order to make it more endurable. Hence all his talk about being a great inventor whose time is too precious for ordinary work. Turning to *The Heather Field*, the parallel with *The Wild Duck* once more becomes obvious. Hjalmar Ekdal and Carden Tyrrell are birds of a feather. The Norwegian day-dreamer would sooner or later have succumbed to the despotic rules of everyday existence if it had not been for the stimulating principle of "the life-lie". For Hjalmar Ekdal was long buoyed up by his illusions of being a clever inventor. In a similar way his Irish descendant was always out of sorts until finally, after much pondering, there came to him "the master-thought of the heather-field".[2] Like Hjalmar Ekdal he cherished this idea until it became an obsession that finally developed into a mania. In a great speech that recalls Hjalmar Ekdal's grandiloquent ejaculations, Carden Tyrrell admits that he, too, was forced to "idealize" the monotonous existence for which he was clearly not fitted. Hence his extravagant speculation in the heather field, which restores his self-respect and gives him a certain amount of courage with which to face his dreary home life.

TYRRELL. Oh, the work is a glorious one. There is something creative about it—this changing the face of a whole country! None of the humdrum, barn-door work of ordinary farming, with its sordid accompani-

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[1] *The Heather Field*, Act I, p. 25.

[2] *Ibid.*, Act II, p. 48.

ment of the cattle fair. When from the ideal world of my books those people forced me to such a business, I was bound to find the extreme of its idealisation.[1]

Furthermore, it is worth noting that Martyn sides with Ibsen in stressing the belief that to a man like Carden Tyrrell the perception of reality must necessarily result in mental, not to say physical collapse.

These are the main points of resemblance between Martyn's hero and some of Ibsen's most prominent *dramatis personae*. Further references to Carden's character will be found in the remaining sections of the present chapter.

As for the other persons that figure in Martyn's play, they hardly give the impression of being the children of an abundant imagination. Like some of Ibsen's inferior literary creations the majority of Martyn's people seem to have been invented merely for the sake of argument, to express an idea. Consequently most of these characters are so abstract and stereotyped as to admit of no individual interpretation.

Episodes

In a comparative study of Martyn's works and those of Ibsen it may not be devoid of interest to find out whether or not Martyn's studies in Ibsen have left any traces on his own dramatic output in the form of actual borrowing of parallel or closely related scenes.

In the first place there is the lengthy scene in the second act of *The Heather Field* in which Carden's wife in an extremely painful way tries to persuade the doctors of her husband's insanity. Although this scene appears to have been primarily modelled on a similar episode in Strindberg's *The Father* (1887),[2] it seems to me

[1] *The Heather Field*, Act II, p. 48.

[2] A French translation of this play was published in Paris as early as 1888.

that there is also an echo of *The Master Builder*. The more so, as this drama, a favourite with Martyn, left its distinctive mark on the delicate ending of *The Heather Field*. As indicated above, Solness, the Master Builder, and Carden are kindred spirits. What interests us here, however, is the fact that Carden's wife, like Mrs. Solness, believes her husband to be mad. Secondly, both wives provoke their partners until these are forced to admit, if only by a slip of the tongue, that they are actually mad.[1] Furthermore, both men are secretly spied upon by the women. Finally, both wives try to save themselves by seeking the assistance of a doctor.

Another parallel, even more telling than the one just dealt with, is to be found at the very end of *The Heather Field*. For what could be more reminiscent of Ibsen's *Ghosts* than the beautiful scene in which Carden Tyrrell passes over the border-land? Osvald's pathetic cry for the sun[2] the very moment his own intellect is darkened for ever finds an almost exact echo in Carden's triumphant vision of "the rain across a saffron sun"[3] which accompanies the gradual dissolution of his mind.

Finally, there is an undeniable similarity between Carden's great project and that of John Gabriel Borkman. As will appear from the following quotations, Martyn's hero, like Ibsen's financier, dreams of becoming a benefactor to his country by exploiting the riches of Nature.

CARDEN. Wait till you see the profits I shall make. With these I shall extend my works; and with the further profits I shall embark on such a scale of business as in time will enable me to start a company for buying up and reclaiming or reafforesting every inch of waste land in Ireland. ... With the far-reaching usefulness of my projects I must become a real benefactor to the country —[4].

BORKMAN. I wanted to have at my command all the sources of power in this country. All the wealth that lay hidden in the soil, and the rocks, and the forests, and the sea—I wanted to gather it all into my hands, to make myself master of it all, and so to promote the well-being of many, many thousands.[5]

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[1] *The Master Builder*, Act II, pp. 264–265. *The Heather Field*, Act I, p. 27.
[2] *Ghosts*, Act III, pp. 294–295. [3] *The Heather Field*, Act III, p. 82.
[4] *The Heather Field*, Act II, pp. 47–48.
[5] *John Gabriel Borkman*, Act II, pp. 247–248.

Thus Carden dreams of doing for Ireland what Borkman had once dreamed of doing for Norway. Like Borkman, Martyn's hero has set his mind on carrying out a gigantic project. Like Ibsen's financier, Carden is fully convinced that the forces of Nature are bound to be controlled by his superior brain.

Technique

Ibsen's dramatic form has long been recognized as one of his most original contributions to the development of modern drama. It was studied with advantage by contemporary playwrights all over the world, even by those who disliked the message of the Norwegian master.

As might be expected from such a keen admirer of Ibsen as Edward Martyn, a careful study of his plays from a technical point of view seems to reveal not a few interesting parallels which strike the reader as being peculiarly suggestive of some of Ibsen's dramatic devices. That this is so becomes apparent already in the work with which the Irish playwright was introduced to the play-going public.

To begin with, the very setting of *The Heather Field* is typically Ibsenian, what with detailed stage-directions for the creation of a double perspective such as open folding-doors leading out into a garden flanked by sea and mountain—an arrangement which corresponds almost exactly to the background of quite a few of Ibsen's plays, notably *The Lady from the Sea* and *Little Eyolf*. As we shall see, the surrounding landscape is furthermore brought to bear on the development of character in a way that recalls some of Ibsen's greatest achievements. Speaking about stage-directions, it is also worth noticing that Martyn adopted Ibsen's novelizing method of introducing his characters to the reading public. Thus Martyn is always particularly anxious to give minute directions as to the exact age and appearance of his *dramatis personae*. In his effort at indi-

vidualization Martyn at times becomes almost as exacting as the great Norwegian in his claims on scenic representation. For the part of Carden Tyrrell, for instance, Martyn prescribes "a rather powerfully built man of one and thirty, with light hair, spare growth of beard, unsteady eyes, very large forehead, and lower part of face small".[1]

By the irony of fate Martyn's people are often characterized in a far better way by similar stage-directions than by their actual way of talking. For when it comes to individualization by means of dialogue, an art wherein Ibsen excelled, Martyn reveals what is, perhaps, his greatest weakness as a dramatist. It would be practically impossible to point to a single play by Martyn, including *The Heather Field*, which is not marred by an uneven style and stilted dialogue.

Returning for a moment to the background of *The Heather Field*, there is no denying the fact that Martyn, as a great lover of Nature, was primarily inspired by the beautiful scenery that surrounded his own castle in the west of Ireland.[2] But one need not study his first play for long to notice that he went to great efforts and, in my opinion, also succeeded in adopting Ibsen's unerring method of scenic representation of the landscape by the use of dialogue, what French critics with a happy term call *décor parlé*. Thus the heather field, though actually never seen by the audience, pervades the action in much the same way as, say, the fatal mill-race and the sea in Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* and *The Lady from the Sea*.

The Norwegian dramatist was particularly fascinated by the problem of the "displaced person", i.e. the open-air man who by the force of circumstances is compelled to give up his ordinary out-of-door life to pine away in a state of mental uneasiness. Having become prisoner on his own estate, Carden Tyrrell is rapidly reduced to a mere shadow of his former self. His pathetic longing for the sun, the firmament and the sea as well as the open-air life in the mountain and the heather field puts us in mind of Allmers in *Little Eyolf*, returning from the serene life of the hills to his

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[1] *The Heather Field*, Act I, p. 9.

[2] One of Martyn's visitors, a young baronet from Kent, speaks of "the delightful soft Irish atmosphere, the stroll over the park, down to watch, through circles of cawing rooks, the sun setting over Galway Bay, and those wild rides in the heather-covered mountains ..." (Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 60.)

depressing home, and, towards the end of the drama, of Osvald in *Ghosts*, to say nothing of Ellida Wangel and Rebekka West who are both consumed by their innate horizon-fever. Finally, one might draw attention to the obvious similarity between Carden and Borkman in *John Gabriel Borkman*, another of Ibsen's castle-builders, who sits brooding in self-imposed captivity, biding his time.

Furthermore, the forces of Nature are brought to bear on the development of character by means of symbolic suggestion in a manner that is strongly reminiscent of Ibsen's effective use of symbolism. Most telling in this respect is perhaps the expressive allegory of Nature revenging herself upon the intruder—the very key-note of the play. As will be seen from the following quotations, this allegory serves a double purpose, being applied both to the hero of the drama and to the heather field itself. By way of parallelism Martyn draws attention to the danger of trying to meddle with the forces of Nature which cannot be subdued with impunity.

USSHER. There are some dispositions too eerie, too ethereal, too untamable for good, steady, domestic cultivation, and if so domesticated they avenge themselves in after time. Ah, foolishly his wife and her friends thought they were going to change Carden to their model of a young man, but the latent, untamable nature was not to be subdued. Its first sign of revolt against suppression was when he began this vast work in the heather field.

...

If heather lands are brought into cultivation for domestic use, they must be watched, they must have generous and loving treatment, else their old wild nature may avenge itself.[1]

This effective way of character revelation apparently owes something to the new, highly developed technique which characterizes the symbolic plays of Ibsen's later period. It is significant that in *The Wild Duck*, where all the main characters are interpreted in the terms of the wild bird that figures in the play, there is also a similar reference to the revenging power of Nature as the one quoted above. Hjalmar Ekdal's father, the old bear-hunter, assails Gregers Werle with questions as to the present state of his old hunting grounds.

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[1] *The Heather Field*, Act I, pp. 8–9.

EKDAL. Are the woods fine up there now?

GREGERS. Not so fine as in your time. They have been thinned a good deal.

EKDAL. Thinned? (*More softly, and as if afraid.*) It's dangerous work that. Bad things come of it. The woods revenge themselves.[1]

To make the parallel even more striking, old Ekdal's parrot-like repetition of "the woods avenge themselves",[2] when, at the end of the drama, he learns about little Hedvig's tragic death, is echoed almost exactly in the words that Martyn puts on the lips of Carden's friend the moment the dreadful truth begins to dawn upon him: "The vengeance of the heather field."[3]

Before leaving the question of Martyn's Ibsenian way of character revelation by means of symbolism, a few words must also be said about the voices that haunt Carden throughout the play. These "voices from the past" form a link between Carden and his youth, the influence of which he cannot escape. The realistic explanation of this supernatural phenomenon is the same as the one given by Ibsen in *The Master Builder*, namely that both Solness and Carden are overstrung. As previously with Ibsen, these voices symbolize the irrational, the inexpressible, all that in the long run is more important to man than anything that can actually happen to him. Just as there is a meaning in the harps that fill the air at the death of the Master Builder, there is a meaning in the "triumphant voices" which Carden hears "in a silver glory of song!" In both cases the celestial music accompanies and interprets the final liberation of a soul in agony.

Thus both Ibsen and Martyn have attained, by similar means, "that silvery beauty which survives in the human heart, which we see shimmering to the horizon, leading our longings beyond the world, and we hear it in our hearts like silver harp strings, sounding seemingly of themselves, for no hand is by".[4]

There are many other technical similarities between *The Heather Field* and some of Ibsen's plays, as for instance the subtle use of dramatic irony which is so characteristic of Ibsen's scenic method.

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[1] *The Wild Duck*, Act. II, p. 256.

[2] *Ibid.*, Act V, pp. 395–396.

[3] *The Heather Field*, Act III, p. 79.

[4] George Moore, preface to *The Heather Field*, p. xxvi.

Mrs. Alving in *Ghosts* tries to save her son's life by idealizing the memory of his dissipated father. Thus Osvald is brought up on a white lie which in reality embitters his whole life, for he cannot rid himself of the completely erroneous idea of having contracted the fatal disease from which he is suffering. Hjalmar Ekdal's marriage is ruined by the gratuitous meddling of his best friend; Hedda Gabler's desperate suicide draws the following comment from the middle-aged cynic of the play: "Good God!—people don't do such things"[1]—and so on.

In *The Heather Field* the final catastrophe is brought about by a similar revelation of the truth. The scene which describes Carden's fatal meeting with his little son, offering him a handful of heather buds, and Carden's staring at them as if he had seen so many ghosts, derives much of its effect from the very irony of the situation which is quite in keeping with Ibsen's achievement by similar means.

Most important of all technical similarities between Ibsen and Martyn is the general structure and the poetic atmosphere of the works of both playwrights. In a penetrating essay on the character of Ibsen's drama the Irish author makes the following statement:

> "He has invented a whole new world for drama, even more interesting than any of the old. He has invented the drama of the mind, where outer action is all subordinate to the tremendous strife of wills and emotions, which work out to their inevitable conclusions with a mastery of art that intellectually delights a thinking audience. ... It would be well for many more to study this great national and, because so great, a world dramatist, whereby they might be led to understand his unapproached excellences, and be put out of conceit with their delusions about their own. They need not agree with Ibsen's opinions, some of which I am far from accepting myself. His opinions do not affect the quality of his technique, which is so original and beyond all rivalry, and rewards the severest study."[2]

And so Martyn in writing *The Heather Field* paid homage to the great Norwegian pioneer, adopting, in his first play, some of Ibsen's fundamental creative principles of the drama. Like his master, Martyn succeeded "where hitherto no modern English dramatist has even dreamed that drama was to be found".[3]

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[1] *Hedda Gabler*, Act IV, p. 185.

[2] Martyn papers, quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, pp. 144–146.

[3] George Moore, preface to *The Heather Field*, p. xxvii.

Some of Martyn's comments on the achievement of Ibsen might well be applied to *The Heather Field.* For is it not a noteworthy attempt, also, at paving the way for the intellectual drama, "the drama of the mind", as Martyn puts it, "where outer action is all subordinate to the tremendous strife of wills and emotions, which work out to their inevitable conclusions".

Indeed, the outer action of *The Heather Field* is reduced to a minimum. Whatever there is of drama, is to be found in the tremendous struggle of the hero for self-realization. Finally, Martyn's play is characterized by that particular blend of apparent realism with genuine poetry which is immediately recognized as typically Ibsenian.

On the other hand, the Irishman's first play must not be dismissed as being merely the work of a dramatist in leading strings. To complete the picture, it is only fair to add that the author of *The Heather Field* offers his readers a highly interesting commentary on purely native conditions. Thus we get a vivid impression of the difficulties that faced Irish landlords towards the end of the last century. The rise of the Land League under Parnell, who wanted to restore the land to the peasants, soon forced landowners all over the country to engage in a back-to-the-wall struggle for their existence. According to Denis Gwynn, "evictions and strikes against payment of rent became more and more frequent, as the Land League spread through the west; and before long, Edward and his mother were to have the bitter experience of having their land-agent shot at near Tulira".[1]

Thus it turns out that Martyn was able to draw on personal experience when he set about writing his first drama. The hero of *The Heather Field* no doubt expresses the extreme landlord views that the author is known to have held at the time of the agrarian unrest. But it is worth observing that Martyn opposes his own hero in the figure of Barry Ussher who tries to persuade Carden Tyrrell to adopt his own policy of voluntary settlement with the tenantry. Tyrrell refuses and is no longer able to visit his domains for fear of being shot at by his own tenants. Thus, although the land question is merely touched upon in Martyn's drama, the personal accent is unmistakable.

[1] Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 54.

The same holds true of the Irishman's critical attitude to women and married life. Here there is a fundamental difference between Ibsen and Martyn. With Maeve as the one notable exception, it is hard to think of a single important female character in the works of Edward Martyn with whom the author is really sympathetic, or, it must be admitted, with whom the reader may sympathize. Sometimes, as in *The Heather Field*, the antagonism between man and wife becomes so accentuated as to remind one of Strindberg. In this respect it seems to me that Martyn's negative attitude to women links him with the Swedish playwright rather than with Ibsen who simply excels in his portraits of great women.

Even at the time of its first production, *The Heather Field* was admired for its firm construction as well as for its subtle use of symbolism which neutralized the realism of the work and gave it the third dimension of poetry. Martyn's drama was regarded as an original attempt at doing for Ireland what Ibsen had already done for Norway. To quote Moore once more, *The Heather Field*

> "was the first play written in English inspired by the examples of Ibsen. ... A play that possesses qualities of balance, design, sequence is a work of art and will hold its own in any company; and although 'The Heather Field' will seem small by the side of 'The Wild Duck,' it will hold its own by the side of 'The Wild Duck,' or 'Macbeth,' or 'Hamlet,' just as a housewife by Peter de Hoogh will hold its own by the side of the 'Marriage Feast' by Veronese, or the 'Entombment of Christ' by Titian, or the 'Last Judgment' by Michael Angelo".[1]

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[1] George Moore, preface to *The Heather Field*, pp. xxii–xxiii.

CHAPTER II

Maeve

When Martyn published his first drama, *The Heather Field*, in the year of 1899, this play was accompanied by *Maeve* with an introduction to both plays by George Moore. *Maeve* was first performed at the Gaiety Theatre on February 20th, 1900.[1] According to Boyd, *The Heather Field* and *Maeve* "were the two plays which constituted the greatest successes of the Irish Literary Theatre".[2] Bourgeois, on the other hand, states that "little enthusiasm was raised" by the production of *Maeve*.[3]

Plot

The scene of *Maeve* is laid in the west of Ireland. "The action," Martyn says, "takes place during the present time about and at O'Heynes Castle among the Burren Mountains of County Clare in Ireland."

At his castle, situated in a romantic landscape, old Colman O'Heynes is dragging out a tedious existence supported only by his two daughters Maeve and Finola. Planning to rise in the world once more, the impoverished old man has gone to great efforts to

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[1] Lady Gregory, *Our Irish Theatre* (London & New York 1913), p. 261.

[2] E. A. Boyd, *The Contemporary Drama of Ireland* (Dublin & London 1918), p. 13.

[3] M. Bourgeois, *John Millington Synge and the Irish Theatre* (London 1913), p. 121.

secure the marriage between Maeve and a wealthy Englishman, Hugh Fitz Walter, whom she does not love but whose riches will enable the old Prince to re-establish himself as "The O'Heynes" among the gentry of County Clare. It turns out, however, that the young Princess has already lost her heart to a mysterious lover who visits her in her dreams together with the legendary heroes and heroines of Ireland's remote past.

Torn between her visions of "the beautiful dead people" and a sense of filial duty to her poverty-stricken father, Maeve is comforted by her old nurse Peg Inerny. This strange old woman feeds the imagination of the young girl with tales of "the other people". Thus Maeve has come to believe that Peg herself changes from the tattered old peasant woman, shunned by the neighbourhood, into the great Queen Maeve. In her plight the lonely Princess looks upon Peg as a medium who may enable her to communicate with the strange lover that haunts her dreams. And so the old hag finds the visionary girl only too responsive to her seductive charm. That same night which happens to be her wedding-eve Maeve accompanies Peg to the mountains to meet the great figures of Ireland's legendary past and the noble lover of her vision. The glory of the frosty moon-lit night on the mountain side holds her spell-bound for several hours. Midnight has just passed when Maeve, deeply stirred by the overpowering beauty of her vision, finds her way back to the old castle, bathed in moonlight.

Instead of going to bed she resorts to a window of the castle from where she can see the mountain range that encircles the ruined abbey, Goban's round tower and the legendary old cairn of Queen Maeve. Without heeding the piercing cold of the night, the young Princess settles herself comfortably at the open window and soon becomes lost in reverie.

In her trance the visionary girl sees the strange procession of Queen Maeve and her attendants rising out of the mysterious cairn. As they approach the castle, the call of the other world becomes irresistible. On its way back the number of the procession is increased, for the spirit of Maeve passes with the Fairy Queen and her retinue into the realm of Tír na n-Óg, the country of the ever-young.

Early in the morning Finola goes to prepare her sister for her

wedding with the young Englishman, only to find the bride sitting cold and lifeless at the open window. At last Maeve has met her noble lover and found "rest in beauty".

Theme

The main themes of the two plays which constituted Martyn's dramatic *début* strike the reader as being closely related to each other. In each case we are confronted with a visionary idealist unable to cope with the cold, materialistic world of reality. Carden Tyrrell's dilemma, like that of Maeve, is emphasized by the striking contrast between the free open-air life on the heights and the dull, depressive life in the valley. In other words, the conflict recalls one of the themes that appear with clock-like regularity in the works of Ibsen, from his early poem *On the Heights* down to *When We Dead Awaken.*

One of Ibsen's principal themes is his insistence upon the individual's loyalty to his calling. Both *The Heather Field* and *Maeve* offer interesting variations of this theme set against an Irish background. Like his Norwegian forerunner, who developed the psychological play to perfection, Martyn stresses the inner drama, presenting in *Maeve* a soul in agony. Trying to live up to the ideal of her visions, Maeve is torn between two incompatible worlds. As with Ibsen in similar conflicts, it is the choice that matters in man's struggle for self-realization. Like Ibsen, Martyn knew exactly how to draw the portrait of a self-absorbed dreamer and idealist so as not to alienate the sympathy of the discerning reader. Thus George Moore, in an admirable comment upon *Maeve*, arrives at the following interesting conclusion: "Although shorn of all common humanity, our sympathy is with her as it is with Carden Tyrrell, and we cry, 'Believe in your warrior of long ago, and let go by you the young Englishman who seeks to rob you of your dream;' and to triumph thus over common instincts and infect the

reader with sympathies and longing which lie beyond the world is surely to succeed where hitherto no modern English dramatist has even dreamed that drama was to be found."[1]

Character

The analysis of *The Heather Field* revealed among other things that character drawing was hardly Martyn's strong point. His failure might have been less apparent had he been able to keep his characters at arm's length. As it is, Martyn's work suffers from the author's stereotyped grouping of the figures in different sets, i.e. the idealists with whom he sympathizes and the materialists who merely provoke his indignation. This tendency is so strong that even his best plays, like *The Heather Field* and the one under discussion, are marred by the author's fatal habit of reading his strange prepossessions into his characters.

Turning to the portrait of Maeve, which in my opinion represents Martyn at his very best, this complicated figure does not at first strike the reader as being particularly Ibsenian. To begin with, it must be admitted that Maeve does not seem to be modelled on any definite character in the works of the Norwegian playwright. This is hardly surprising for a man of Martyn's extensive reading. Being well versed in the drama of Ibsen, the Irishman was in a position to pick and choose significant features from more than one of the old master's plays.

Ibsen was duly praised for his penetrating studies of half-grown, precocious girls, sometimes dreaming and sensitive like Hedvig in *The Wild Duck*, sometimes high-strung and fanatical like Hilde Wangel in *The Master Builder*. In spite of Martyn's different aim, elements of both these types were incorporated into his picture of Maeve. Like Ibsen's young heroines, the Irish girl creates her own dream-world, jealously protecting it against intrusion from abroad. Furthermore, Maeve's imagination, like that of Hedvig, is secretly

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[1] George Moore, preface to *The Heather Field & Maeve*, p. xxvii.

nourished by her eager study of the book treasures in the mysterious garret.[1] Finally, both girls, sensitive and vulnerable though they be, turn out to be strong enough to stand up for their ideals, facing death rather than linger in a world of selfishness and materialism.

The spiritual superiority of Maeve together with her heroic struggle for self-realization are apt to surprise in a character conceived by a notorious misogynist. This somewhat unexpected exception to the rule is, of course, mainly due to the patriotic background and purpose of the play. But I feel convinced that it also owes at least something to the author's studies in Ibsen. For it is a well-known characteristic of the work of the great Norwegian that practically all the women of his plays stand head and shoulder above the weak, irresolute men whose lives they dominate.

Like so many of Ibsen's heroes and heroines, Maeve is carried away by an inner urge that cannot be suppressed without danger. Her feelings prove stronger than the voice of the intellect.

> "I must! I must; thus a voice commands me deep in my soul,—and I will obey that voice."

These words form the opening lines of Ibsen's first play, *Catilina* (1850). Throughout the dramatist's later work the voice of the rebel Catilina is echoed by a surprisingly great number of his leading characters, particularly the women, who usually act from a similar impulse of being compelled to revolt in one way or another.

Martyn's heroine is torn between two worlds. She cannot live without her love, she cannot die without her soul. In the end filial duty is overcome by the young girl's longing for self-realization. Yielding to her beautiful vision of Ireland's legendary past, Maeve renounces her family and the world to find peace in the cold arms of her unknown lover.

What Martyn shows us is a soul in agony. Like Ibsen's rebellious Nora she is aware of her duty to her family. But, again like Nora, it dawns upon her that she has an even greater duty to herself. Naturally I do not want to imply that Maeve is an Irish Nora. My sole object is to draw attention to a remarkable similarity as regards the spiritual conflict of *Maeve* and that of not only *A Doll's House*

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[1] Cf. Mary Bruin in Yeats' *The Land of Heart's Desire.*

but of a great number of Ibsen's plays where the main theme in the Norwegian's own words is "the struggle which all serious-minded human beings have to wage with themselves in order to bring their lives into harmony with their convictions".[1]

As often with Ibsen's characters, Martyn's heroine is gradually isolated by her extravagant dream, irreconcilable as it is with actual conditions and the demands of ordinary people. Indeed, Maeve has much in common with those men of Ireland's dim and distant past "who believed so much in the soul, and so little in anything else, that they were never entirely certain that the earth was solid under the foot-sole".[2]

But, and this is another characteristic trait, Maeve is not merely an idealist. She is also an aesthete unable to come to terms with life for she is above the sordid engagements of the world. To save her individuality the visionary girl disregards the demands of life and resorts to a kind of spiritual escapism. Shut up in the ivory tower of her dreams, Maeve deliberately turns her back upon those around her lest human considerations should spoil her beautiful vision of the other-world. By adopting an essentially aesthetic attitude towards life Maeve succeeds in regaining her spiritual freedom and integrity. Hence her strange way of looking at life as if in a mirror that has little more than a pale reflexion of the world to offer her lonely soul. As a matter of fact it would seem that Maeve is primarily a product of the literary aestheticism of the 1890's.

The following two quotations illustrate the conflict of the heroine better than many words. To begin with, we have Maeve's disillusioned remark on the effect of her visions:

MAEVE (*wistfully*). Such beautiful dead people! ... I see them now, and I see others who lived long before them, and are buried in that green cairn. Oh, I am dying because I am exiled from such beauty.[3]

Towards the end of the drama Martyn focuses attention upon the dilemma of Maeve by putting the following credo on her lips: "Form is my beauty and my love!"[4]

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[1] Letter to Bjørn Kristensen, dated Munich, 13th February, 1887. *The Correspondence of Henrik Ibsen* (London 1905), p. 412.

[2] *Samhain* 4, 1904, quoted W. B. Yeats, *Plays and Controversies* (London 1923), p. 123.

[3] *Maeve*, Act I, pp. 88–89.

[4] *Maeve*, Act II, p. 122.

These words strike the very key-note of the play which simply abounds with "beauty from the past", "greatest beauty", "immortal beauty of form", and "rest in beauty". Thus we are once more reminded of the fact that in spite of the genuine Irishness of the drama, Maeve herself is by origin in many respects a product of the literary aestheticism of the time.

But it would be a definite mistake, I think, to read her words merely like an effective motto. For is it not possible, without being fanciful, to look upon this outburst of *l'art pour l'art* as a private confession of the author? With Maeve Martyn shared an overweening passion for the beauty of form. But unlike his heroine, who managed to live up to her vision, Martyn was only partly successful when it came to presenting his own dreams in a literary form.

The conflict between the aesthetic and the ethical recurs from time to time in the works of the Norwegian playwright. With him it is something of a *leitmotif*, spanning a period of almost exactly half a century. One of the "trolls" Ibsen kept fighting throughout his life was the aesthete. Over and over again, the dramatist exposes the man who remains a spectator looking at life "through the hollow hand" in order to improve the perspective rather than descend from the heights of self-imposed isolation. Thus the perils of indulging too freely in aestheticism are repeatedly emphasized by Ibsen in a long series of works, from the important poem *On the Heights*, written as early as 1859–60, down to the fin-de-siècle cult of aestheticism in, say, *Hedda Gabler* with the heroine's insistence upon "death in beauty", and *When We Dead Awaken* with its *Einsame Menschen* to quote the title of one of Hauptmann's most Ibsenian plays. *When We Dead Awaken* was the Norwegian's "dramatic epilogue". Only here, with death close upon his heels, did Ibsen realize that he himself had never lived. "The hollow hand" had beaten him. And yet he tells his readers that if he were allowed to live his life over again, he would once more choose art rather than life. For in the words of Martyn's heroine, "form was indeed his beauty and his love!"

In spite of much apparent dissimilarity of subject and intention, the fact remains that Martyn's heroine is also finally caught by "the hollow hand" and frozen to death for a mere fancy in a way which recalls Ibsen's treatment of similar conflicts.

Summing up, one might say that the literary origin of a character like Maeve can be traced back to different sources. Primarily she is no doubt a daughter of her native country, inspired by Martyn's own knowledge of Irish folklore.[1] Besides, there is more than an echo of Yeats' early play *The Land of Heart's Desire* where "stars walk upon a mountain-top" and fairies "dance upon the mountains like a flame".

On the other hand, Maeve is undoubtedly also a product of the 1890's, whereas Martyn's framing of the problem, including his strong emphasis on the aesthetic conflict, as well as his subtle treatment of the heroine's mental development must be looked upon as proof positive of actual influence from the Ibsenian drama of ideas.

So much for the literary reminiscences that went into the portrait of Maeve. As for the minor characters of the play, it cannot be denied that they are even more stereotyped than those of *The Heather Field*. Peg Inerny is the one notable exception. For this strange old woman is one of the very few subordinate parts that Martyn managed to individualize to such a degree that it really sticks in your mind.

As in the case of Queen Maeve and her young namesake, Martyn was able to draw from native sources for his fine characterization of this repulsive, yet strangely fascinating woman who believes that she is a queen "when in faery". According to Yeats, Peg Inerny existed in real life. In the essay already referred to Yeats writes: "Biddy Early, who journeyed with the people of faery when night fell, and who cured multitudes of all kinds of sickness, if the tales that one hears from her patients are not all fancy, is, I think, the origin of his Peg Inerny; but there were, and are, many like her."[2]

It is, however, worthy of observation that Martyn confided to Yeats "that he knew nothing, or next to nothing, about the belief in such women as Peg Inerny among the Irish peasants. Unless the imagination has a means of knowledge peculiar to itself, he must have heard of this belief as a child and remembered it in that unconscious and instinctive memory on which imagination builds".[3]

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[1] See e.g. W. B. Yeats' important essay "Maive and Certain Irish Beliefs", *Beltaine*, February 1900.

[2] W. B. Yeats, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 14.

It seems to me, however, that the portrait of Peg Inerny may have been partly inspired by a similar character in one of Ibsen's later plays.

At the time of Martyn's dramatic *début*, *Little Eyolf* was one of the most recent dramas by the hand of the Norwegian master. Now, there is one thing in particular that singles out this play, published as late as 1894, from the majority of Ibsen's other works, namely the introduction of the curious Rat-Wife. The short appearance of this sinister character in the first act of the play, immediately produces an uncanny atmosphere that lingers throughout the drama.

In *Maeve* the introduction of Peg Inerny has a very similar effect. Even a cursory reading of this part reveals some interesting points of resemblance with that of the Rat-Wife. True, both women are introduced for different symbolic reasons. But the psychological correspondence between the two characters is unmistakeable. The strange behaviour of the old women, always at their busiest in the dead of night, tells its own story. Thus both seem to nodalize the forces of the supernatural and the gruesome. The Rat-Wife and Peg Inerny feed the imagination of little Eyolf and Maeve with their siren song of sleep and dream. Finally, both the boy and the girl succumb to the lure of the old women who bring about their premature death.

Technique

As shown by the previous investigation, Martyn's drama, like that of Ibsen, is deficient in external action. Thus Moore was perfectly right in pointing out that in *Maeve* "human emotion is the whole of the play".[1] As a matter of fact this very aspect of Martyn's fairy play constitutes the nearest approach to the Ibsenian theatre. Like Ibsen, the Irish playwright is not primarily

[1] Moore, *l.c.*, p. xxvii.

interested in the outer world. The conflict of the soul is their drama. Characteristically enough, *Maeve* is subtitled "a psychological drama". It is typical of Martyn's way of working that, like Ibsen, he chooses for his theme an emotional conflict, more particularly a soul at a crisis. Furthermore, the main tension of the play is caused by the ultimate choice of the heroine. For Martyn, and here we are once more reminded of his great forerunner, is primarily absorbed by the struggle for self-realization of his leading characters.

Examining *Maeve* from the point of view of dramatic method, one cannot help noticing Martyn's close adherence to some of Ibsen's principal technical rules, such as the importance of selection and concentration. Hence the careful minimization of external action. Hence also the small cast. Numbers would have stifled the tragedy.

As to the power of individualization, an art in which the Norwegian playwright excelled, we have already seen that Martyn was only partly successful. Generally speaking, one might say that the plays in which Martyn appears to advantage, notably *The Heather Field* and *Maeve*, derive much of their strength and dramatic effect from the influence of Ibsen's scenic method. It is, after all, only natural that the technical innovations that the Northern master passed on to contemporary playwrights all over the world should have left their mark on the works of such a devout Ibsenite as Edward Martyn.

Apart from what has already been said above, one is often struck by Martyn's extensive use of symbolism. Once more the strains were caught up from the Norwegian dramatist.

In a previous study[1] the present writer has discussed a peculiar aspect of Ibsen's scenic method, i.e. the author's strange habit, when one of his characters is drawn to another, of making the latter symbolic.[2] Thus Ellida Wangel in *The Lady from the Sea* is attracted by the Stranger and the Sea, and Solness in *The Master Builder* by Hilde and Youth. Of particular interest in this respect are two other characters, namely Brand who is haunted by Gerd

[1] *Ibsen and the Beginnings of Anglo-Irish Drama.* I. *John Millington Synge* (Upsala 1951), p. 21.

[2] See Henning Kehler, "Studier i det ibsenske Drama", *Edda*, V (1916), p. 97.

and the Ice Church, and little Eyolf, magnetically drawn to the Rat-Wife and Death.

In the same mysterious way Martyn's Maeve is hypnotized by her noble lover, the Ice Prince, and by his realm of Beauty that unfolds in Death. Although this "prince of the hoar dew" never appears in the play, he certainly makes his presence felt in a much stronger way than Maeve's anaemic English suitor. In the extremely moving end of the drama, Maeve's true lover clutches the girl in his ice-cold arms, for he is Death, leaving the scene "completely white with a thick coating of hoar frost".

Ibsen, we have seen, often introduced symbolic characters to give the climax of the action an illusion of inevitability. Sometimes, as in *Rosmersholm*, the symbol does not materialize. But the white horses that haunt the old family estate and the fatal mill-race by which Rosmer and Rebekka are finally engulfed no doubt serve the same purpose of stressing the inevitable character of the double suicide at the end of the drama. Furthermore, this kind of symbolism introduces an element of ambiguity which adds to the fascination of the drama.

Investigating Martyn's play from a similar point of view, it is interesting to find that in writing *Maeve* the author resorted to almost exactly the same technical device. The mysterious "day-ghost" that haunts the heroine with its "wistful pleading" is obviously but a projection of Ibsen's supernatural beings, invented to serve as a link between two worlds as well as to prepare the reader for the tragic end.

In this connection it is worth noticing that in *Maeve*, as also in *The Heather Field*, Martyn adopts his master's habit of providing a rationalistic explanation of the supernatural element that dominates the drama. Peer Gynt, to take an early example, "runs his head against a rock, falls and remains stretched on the ground"[1] before he meets with the Green-Clad Woman, the Trolls and the Boyg. In other words, Peer's accident accounts for his hallucinations, including his strange visit to the King of the Dovre-Trolls.

Similarly the white scarf which is so inseparately associated with Rebekka West acts as a connecting link between the inhabitants of

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[1] *Peer Gynt*, Act II, p. 65.

Rosmersholm and the ghosts, i.e. the White Horses that haunt the place. Here the white scarf of the mistress of Rosmersholm affords a possible explanation of the ghostly disturbances as we are given to understand that the old servant may have mistaken the woman in white for the spectral horses.

Turning to Martyn, the great dream-scene in which Queen Maeve summons the young girl to Tír na n-Óg is no doubt a mere projection of the heroine's last dream as death gently steals upon her in the bitter cold of the night.

According to Allardyce Nicoll, "Martyn's real strength is seen to lie in this strange union of reality and of the supernatural. Few dramatists have succeeded as he did in welding together into a complete whole these two spheres".[1] Few dramatists maybe, but here again Ibsen is surely to be counted among the pioneers of this particular kind of drama. The author of *The Wild Duck*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea* and *The Master Builder* was bound to attract a man like Martyn, inducing him to try his own hand at a similar work. For in these plays the union of fact and fantasy is masterly attained. Here the ageing master deals with the fascination of Nature and the supernatural in terms of symbolism in a way that does not spoil the illusion of reality. This is precisely what Martyn set out to do and also managed to achieve at the beginning of his career when he was still chiefly under the spell of the great Norwegian.

With the passing of the years, however, Martyn's drama takes on a new aspect. Although still faithful to Ibsen, the Irish playwright tends to abandon his early highly poetic themes in order to concentrate his efforts on various topics of everyday life. But in so doing, Martyn unfortunately betrays an increasing preoccupation with some of the less attractive features of the Ibsenian drama. In *Maeve*, however, there is as yet no sign of the cold realism, not to say melodrama, that left its mark on Martyn's later works.

Before leaving the subject of symbolism in *Maeve*, a few words must also be said about Martyn's treatment of a well-known Irish theme, i.e. the harp-motif, to be found not only in *Maeve* but also in *The Heather Field* and linking both plays technically to *The*

[1] A. Nicoll, *British Drama* (London 1949), p. 418.

Master Builder. Like Solness, both Carden Tyrrell and Maeve hear voices and melodies from another world. Although the harpers are actually introduced in *Maeve*, whereas the music is only heard from above in the two other plays, the dramatic significance of this particular device remains the same. The soft music is simply indispensable in all the plays as a means of symbolizing the inner drama. In *Maeve* the harps are admirably tuned to the serene mood of the heroine the moment her soul—all passion spent—passes over the border-land.

In spite of Ibsen's strong hold on Martyn, the Norwegian master did not reign supreme. We have already seen that *Maeve* was inspired by different sources, both native and foreign. Maurice Maeterlinck, for instance, developed the inner drama to perfection in a series of plays published in the 1890's. The dream-like atmosphere, the static situation and the symbolism of these exquisite works no doubt appealed to the author of *Maeve* who may be said to move within the same sphere as the Belgian dramatist. It needs stressing, however, that the lofty idealism of Edward Martyn's early plays forms a striking contrast to the extreme pessimism of Maeterlinck's *théâtre statique*.

As early as 1892 Yeats published his first drama, *The Countess Cathleen*, to be followed in 1894 by his beautiful fairy play *The Land of Heart's Desire*. The heroines of both plays are brought to a premature death by their love of Ireland and things Irish. Thus Countess Cathleen sells her own soul in order to save the lives of her countrymen, whereas Mary Bruin sacrifices wedded love for her still greater love of fairydom—the land of heart's desire.

No doubt symbolic elements from both these plays went into the writing of *Maeve*. As a matter of fact Yeats' description of Martyn's play as a symbol of "Ireland's choice between English materialism and her own natural idealism, as well as the choice of every individual soul"[1] reads like a synopsis of *The Countess Cathleen*. On the other hand, it is only fair to add that Yeats himself, while writing his one-act play *Cathleen ni Houlihan*, seems to have been inspired by his friend's powerful portrait of Peg Inerny.[2]

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[1] W. B. Yeats, *Beltaine*, February 1900, p. 3.

[2] Cf. C. Weygandt, *Irish Plays and Playwrights* (London 1913), p. 94.

Martyn's treatment of the landscape is another aspect of *Maeve* that calls for special attention in a study of the author's indebtedness to Ibsen. The scenery of *Maeve* is that of western Ireland and gives the impression of being modelled on the beautiful surroundings of Martyn's own castle, situated in this part of the country. But, and this is one of the most significant technical parallels to the Ibsenian drama, the manner in which the landscape is brought to bear on human emotions is undoubtedly reminiscent of Ibsen's scenic method. The same applies to Martyn's successful way of introducing the landscape by means of dialogue.[1]

With Ibsen Nature, in true romantic style, was frequently treated as a kind of symbolic supplement to the action. This holds true of the majority of his plays, particularly those written in the '80's and the '90's, such as *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Little Eyolf*, and *John Gabriel Borkman*. In other words it is characteristic of Ibsen's technique that the settings are constantly brought to harmonize with the subject of the play. Those that treat of freedom and truth and personal integrity very often take place in the open air, preferably on mountain heights or on the seaboard. On the other hand, Ibsen's gloomy interiors, still the object of much carping criticism, were generally reserved for his plays of social reform in which the stuffy atmosphere serves as a striking contrast to the brightness of the exterior.

In *Maeve* there is a similar correspondence between the visionary heroine and the serene beauty of the surrounding landscape. In the first act the wistful young girl sits brooding among the ruins in the saffron sunlight of the evening waiting for the vision of the beautiful dead people to take possession of her responsive mind. Thus the ruined landscape is skilfully brought to bear on the mood of the young Princess, accentuating at the same time the dramatic conflict of the play.

The scene of the second act is laid outside the old castle the night before Maeve's wedding. Again there is a perfect harmony between character and setting. Technically, this act derives much from the last act of *Brand*. Here the art of defining character in terms of symbolical scenery is brought to perfection. The cold,

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[1] Cf. above, *The Heather Field*, p. 35.

ascetic hero stands out against a background of ice and snow. The play ends on a note of symbolism. In a final effort to live up to his own motto, *All or Nothing*, Brand climbs the great glacier. At the sight of God's clear sky the cold ice in Brand's tormented soul begins to melt. But his new vision comes too late. Brand reaches the heights once more only to meet his death in the cold arms of the Ice Church as he is swept away by an avalanche.

In *Maeve*, the death-scene of the heroine is built up on much the same lines. As with Ibsen the setting is allowed to play its own significant part in the drama. The frosty night, the cold moon wandering among the lonely mountains, the leafless ash trees, the hoar frost, "the Northern lights of Tirnan-ogue", the grey light of dawn, all these details are cleverly worked out to provide a symbolical background for the triumphant passing of the cold, ecstatic, "beautiful ice maiden".

To complete the analysis, a few words may be quoted from one of Martyn's essays dealing with Ibsen and touching on *Maeve*: "I should like to know the modern dramatists who have since made old-fashioned the art of Ibsen? Who are they who have caught its least excellence, to say nothing of improving on it? I thought that I had developed something from it in my *Maeve*, where I made a girl pine and die for a lover who had no existence, and gave it a semblance of truth. Ibsen was so great, so far before his time, that up to this the best dramatist since is but a pigmy compared with him."[1]

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[1] Martyn papers, quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

CHAPTER III

The Tale of a Town

Completed in the summer of 1899 and published with *An Enchanted Sea* in 1902, *The Tale of a Town* was first produced by the National Players in 1905. In a prefatory note to this "comedy of affairs in five acts" the author makes the following statement: "There was an adaptation of THE TALE OF A TOWN called THE BENDING OF THE BOUGH made by Mr. George Moore, with my consent, for the Irish Literary Theatre performances in 1900." 'Adaptation', by the way, is hardly the right word, because in rehashing the play Moore deliberately disregarded his friend's original intentions.

"With the published version of *Maeve* and the production of the *Heather Field* to go upon, who would have predicted *The Tale of a Town?*"[1] In these words a well-known authority on the Irish dramatic movement sums up what seems to be a general attitude among critics towards Martyn's third drama. The same author devotes several pages to a comparison between Martyn's play and Moore's *The Bending of the Bough* in order to show the superiority of the latter work.

Having studied both plays, I find it difficult to accept such a verdict. In the first place Moore, for all his virtuosity as an artist, was primarily a novelist. When he chose to dabble in play-writing he was invariably let down by his Muse. "In credibility of action," Williams writes, "Mr. Moore may have improved upon his original; but just where the author is strongest in his novels he is weakest in *The Bending of the Bough*. It is a colourless production, its dialogue largely in the air and devoid of local characteristics—a play made in the study about people whom the author has not known intimately."[2] Secondly, Moore himself was aware of his own failure as

[1] Ellis-Fermor, *op. cit.*, p. 38.

[2] Harold Williams, *Modern English Writers* (London 1918), p. 201.

shown by the following apology: "The Comedy, entitled *The Bending of the Bough*, was written in two months, and two months are really not sufficient time to write a five-act comedy in."[1]

Many years later even Yeats had to admit that "*The Bending of the Bough* was badly constructed, had never become a single thought or passion, but was the first dramatisation of an Irish problem."[2] Why Irish? Yeats seems to have forgotten that Moore laid the scene of *The Bending of the Bough* in Scotland, thereby completely missing the point of *The Tale of a Town* which is a satire upon Irish conditions. Poor Martyn! Not only was his own play suppressed by his own friends. He also suffered the humiliation of seeing his original idea exploited at the hands of a fellow-countryman who was no more at home in the realm of drama than he was in his own native country. In my opinion Ernest A. Boyd, the well-known historian of the Irish Literary Renaissance, hit the nail on the head by saying that *The Bending of the Bough* "is *possibly*[3] a better written play, but is not, therefore, a better Irish play."[4]

Plot

The scene of Martyn's "comedy of affairs" is laid in a small coast town in the west of Ireland. Up to the present the town has prospered because it happens to be the nearest port in Europe to America. When the play opens we learn, however, that a rival English town, Anglebury, by the use of bribes has deprived the Irish of their American line of steamers. The authorities of the Irish town "were to receive a percentage on all harbour rates in Anglebury, where the shipping was known to be enormous". But —and this is where the conflict begins—so far the Irish have not

[1] *Samhain*, 1901, quoted Boyd, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

[2] W. B. Yeats, *Dramatis Personae 1896–1902* (London 1936), p. 48.

[3] The italics are the present writer's.

[4] Boyd, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

been blessed with a single penny. Enter the young hero of the play, Alderman Jasper Dean. Denouncing the sordid intrigues of the authorities of the English seaport, as well as the treachery of some of his own colleagues who, it appears, are not above taking bribes from the English, Jasper Dean manages to unite the Corporation in a final attempt to save the town from further decline. But it is too late. The English have all the trumps in their hand, for Jasper Dean is engaged to an ambitious young girl who happens to be the niece of the Mayor of Anglebury. She tells Dean that she has no intention whatever to bury herself in Ireland. If he wants to marry her, he had better forget his country—"this poor mean place"—and go with her to England which she depicts as a land of "riches and prosperity". At first Dean puts up a gallant fight for Ireland: "I love this poor mean place better than your England that has made it poor and mean. But it will not remain so. We are at last united, and we shall enforce payment of those riches we know are our due."

But it soon turns out that Jasper Dean has been sufficiently corrupted by his future wife and by her well-to-do set to give up his leadership and betray his own town.

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There are many reasons why the student of Ibsen's influence on Martyn should pay special attention to *The Tale of a Town*. It is the Irishman's first attempt at social satire in a middle-class drama. Here as elsewhere Ibsen had been the great emancipator with plays like *Pillars of Society*, *A Doll's House*, *Ghosts*, and *An Enemy of the People*.

Apparently Martyn had a first-hand knowledge of Ibsen's social drama when he set about writing his own Tale of a Town. In any case the finished play, immature though it is, strikes the reader as being cast in practically the same mould as, say, *An Enemy of the People*. Although Martyn's love intrigue has nothing whatever to do with Ibsen's drama, the fact remains that both works develop on much the same lines. The very subject of *The Tale of a Town* links the play with *An Enemy of the People*. As in Ibsen's drama the scene is laid in a small seaside town. The action of both plays

centres on a similar problem. The authorities of either town stand the immediate risk of being cut off from their principal source of income, the kind of business that has made their town a regular gold-mine. In *An Enemy of the People* the threat against the municipal Baths, symbol of the town's prosperity and progress, sets the play going in precisely the same way as the loss of the American packet station in *The Tale of a Town.*

The use of the same middle-class material no doubt accounts for some of the parallels between the two plays. Definitely Ibsenian, however, is the way in which Martyn manages to produce a genuine small town atmosphere. The reader is confronted with a world of chattering busybodies and perpetual turncoats. Like his master, the Irish playwright attacks the "lokale forholde", above all social hypocrisy and social climbing.

The upbringing of Martyn's young hero connects him with two of Ibsen's best known characters. To explain the weakness of Jasper Dean, the Irish dramatist informs his readers that the orphan boy has been brought up by a couple of muddleheaded aunts, who have done their best to spoil him. Now, this very constellation seems to have been extremely popular with Ibsen who made effective use of it not only in *The Wild Duck* but also in *Hedda Gabler*. The appearance of the ubiquitous aunts of *The Tale of a Town* produces the same nonsensical atmosphere as the coming and going of Aunt Julia in the home of Tesman and Hedda Gabler. Martyn's hero is also linked up with *An Enemy of the People*. To be sure, Jasper Dean is no Dr. Stockmann. But he is introduced into the play for the same sake of contrast that characterizes *An Enemy of the People*, i.e. the contrast between an idealistic hero, who is the only person that really loves his town, and the "damned compact majority" of miserable timeservers and ruthless placehunters.

Sometimes an Ibsenian note creeps into the dialogue of Martyn's play. Listen to the following discussion between three of the Aldermen and the Town Clerk in the first act of *A Tale of a Town.* It evokes the Puddletonian atmosphere of *An Enemy of the People* with its vivid picture of the pen-and-ink war in the columns of the *People's Messenger* and the hullabaloo about the Doctor and his mission.

FOLEY. In honour and conscience I feel bound to take some action at the meeting to-day.

CASSIDY. Whether you obtain general support or not, Alderman Foley, will largely depend upon the nature of your action.

FOLEY. You have read my article in the "Weekly Denouncer"?

KIRWAN. It was full of fury, as usual, against the enemies of our town.

FOLEY. The sense of our wrongs fills me with uncontrollable indignation. It is nothing but the sense of our wrongs that keeps me before the public at all.

CLORAN. Indeed, Alderman Foley, the people do say that you have a mission among them.[1]

The satire of both plays is directed against those who go with the flock. Says Aslaksen, the printer, to Dr. Stockmann: "It's always well to have the majority with you, Doctor."[2] And Hovstad, the editor, joins in the chorus: "The majority always has right on its side."[3]

Turning to Martyn's play, we find that the author merely substitutes "the winning side" for "the compact majority" of *An Enemy of the People*. Thus Jasper Dean is constantly urged to "take care and keep on the winning side".[4] ... "To be sure, Jasper —the winning side is always in the right."[5]

Then there is the conflict between the people and the authorities. Hovstad, the editor, is a man of humble origin, a fact that has given him "ample opportunities of seeing what the lower classes really require".[6] A self-made man, Hovstad has no high opinion of the leading men of the town. He arrogantly declares that "we can get on without these august personages".[7]

In *The Tale of a Town* Mrs. Costigan, the charwoman, voices the opposition in a similar way.

Mrs. COSTIGAN. Oh, you're a proud man to be town clerk; but I can tell you this Corporation you think so fine, isn't respected much in the town.

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[1] *The Tale of a Town*, Act I, pp. 11–12.
[2] *An Enemy of the People*, Act II, p. 49.
[3] *Ibid.*, Act IV, p. 134.
[4] *The Tale of a Town*, Act IV, p. 94.
[5] *Ibid.*, p. 84.
[6] *An Enemy of the People*, Act II, p. 47.
[7] *Ibid.*, p. 46.

CLORAN. You are, no doubt, a sound authority as to the feeling of our town, ma'am.

MRS. COSTIGAN. I'm in the way of hearing many complaints, Mr. Cloran; and believe me if you don't begin to do the people some good, none of you will long remain where you are.[1]

It needs stressing that the Irish playwright leans heavily on Ibsen in his handling of the tumultuous scenes which form such a characteristic part of the plays under discussion. It is hardly a coincidence that the climax of both *An Enemy of the People* and *The Tale of a Town* is a stormy 'political' meeting resulting in street demonstrations with an aggressive mob flinging stones through the windows of the home of the hero.

In his play Ibsen made a drunken man interrupt the meeting at short intervals.

A Drunken Man (*at the main entrance.*) I'm a ratepayer, so I've a right to my opinion! And it's my full, firm, incomprehensible opinion that—

Several Voices. Silence up there!

Others. He's drunk! Turn him out! (*The drunken man is turned out.*)[2]

It is interesting to find that Martyn uses exactly the same trick in one of the most effective scenes of his play. The big meeting of the fourth act is held in the principal hotel of the town. And here Mrs. Costigan is introduced and turned out with the same precision as Ibsen's drunken man.

MRS. COSTIGAN (*having meanwhile repeatedly helped herself to the liquor*). Who's talking of dynamiters?

...

CLORAN. For shame, woman—out you go. Come along—

MRS. COSTIGAN. Hooray! I'm the voice of the people. Hooray—what—you Corporation—are you turning out the people? I'm a respectable woman—

(*She is hustled out by Cloran ...*)[3]

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So much for the common pattern of the two plays. To complete the analysis, mention should also be made of the manner in which

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[1] *The Tale of a Town*, Act I, p. 6.

[2] *An Enemy of the People*, Act IV, pp. 127–128.

[3] *The Tale of a Town*, Act IV, p. 97.

Martyn differs from the Northern master. *The Tale of a Town* happens to be an excellent illustration of the subject, for it is an early example of the kind of drama Martyn would write when thrown entirely upon his own resources.

To begin with, the reader of *The Tale of a Town* is struck by a certain lack of proportion of the play. It is as if the author of the previous dramas had suddenly forgotten the importance of such vital dramatic principles as elimination and concentration. He gathers a rich material but, unlike Ibsen, he does not know how to sift it. *The Tale of a Town* is laboured and top-heavy simply because the author insists on cramming more into his play than it can actually hold.

Faulty individualization is another weakness of Martyn's drama. The author is at his best with only a small group of characters. The handling of an extensive cast like that of *The Tale of the Town* is definitely beyond his power. In vain does he struggle to get his personages at arm's length. Most of them remain marionettes moved by clockwork.

The Norwegian playwright on the other hand studies his *dramatis personae* until he knows all about them, including their way of dressing and talking, their characteristic traits and habits as well as their way of acting and reacting in a certain situation. This power of individualization endows Ibsen's characters with the kind of inner life that immediately captivates an audience.

Turning to *The Tale of a Town*, this is precisely where the Irish dramatist fails to convince his readers who have to put up not only with an anaemic hero but also with an endless group of minor characters who are merely there to make the wheel go round.

Unlike Ibsen, and unlike most of his Irish fellow-dramatists, Martyn did not often master the art of writing effective dialogue. The trouble with *The Tale of a Town* is that "the talk of the town" does not ring true. Although he knew Ibsen's plays only through the mist of translations, the Irish disciple was always full of admiration for the variety and veracity of the master's dialogue which seemed to him not only poetic in its realism but also beautifully tailored to the character.[1]

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[1] Cf. Martyn papers, quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

But Edward Martyn, for all his enthusiasm about the theatre, was hampered in his own writing by a certain lack of spontaneity which made it difficult for him to strike the right note of everyday conversation. George Moore, it is true, complimented the author of *The Tale of a Town* on "a certain improvement in the dialogue".[1] But he was merely praising with his tongue in his cheek. The whole play, he added, was so bad that it could not attract "any possible audience—Irish, English, or Esquimaux".[2] The plot of *The Tale of a Town* is interesting enough, but the dialogue is as longwinded as it is stilted and crude. For try as he may, Martyn never approached true dramatic speech. "No politicians," Weygandt writes, "even when egged on by their envious womankind, would ever give themselves away as do these of 'A Tale of a Town'. They are as frankly self-revelatory as if they were characters in a morality play."[3] It did not occur to Weygandt that Martyn may well have had some similar idea in his mind. A glance at the cast of *The Tale of a Town* informs us that the author invented symbolical names for a surprisingly great number of his characters. Hardman, the English Lord Mayor, and his plutocratic niece, Miss Millicent Fell, are already mentioned. To these may be added Joseph Tench, the Irish Mayor, as well as Murphy, Foley and Leech, Aldermen of the Corporation.[4] This particular device is repeated in *The Place-Hunters*,[5] a one-act comedy that brings before us such formidable characters as The Right Hon. Steppingstone Feathernest, Fencesitter Fisher and Lord Kilcooly. In my opinion Martyn deliberately uses this very artifice in order to enhance the satirical effect of the plays.

Martyn's satire illustrates another important difference between the two playwrights. It seems to me that the Irishman was born with a grievance against the world. There is a strong connecting link between the comparatively young man who made his literary

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[1] *Ave*, p. 127.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 127. Cf. Yeats' criticism, quoted above, of George Moore's *The Bending of the Bough.*

[3] Weygandt, *op. cit.*, p. 89.

[4] Ibsen, by the way, was fond of the same trick. But it stands to reason that the true significance of most of his characterizing names must have escaped the Irish dramatist.

[5] Published in *The Leader*, July 26, 1902.

début in 1890 with the all-destroying prose satire *Morgante the Lesser* and the author of *The Dream Physician*, a drama published almost a quarter of a century later.

Martyn's indignation is genuine enough. But, unlike Ibsen, he does not know how to sugar his pill. Where the Norwegian playwright mixes his scorn with subtle humour, Martyn has little else to offer his readers but scorn and contempt. The satire of *The Tale of a Town* is so clumsy and, above all, so exaggerated as to destroy at once the illusion of reality that characterizes the opening scene of the play. The author's satirical weapon recoils like a boomerang and he himself appears utterly devoid of Ibsen's sympathy and pity for humankind.

And yet, when all is said the fact remains that Martyn's "comedy of affairs" was breaking fresh ground. *The Tale of a Town* marks a new departure not only in the author's own dramatic output but also in the field of Irish drama which had till then been somewhat limited in its scope.

CHAPTER IV

An Enchanted Sea

As mentioned above, Edward Martyn published his second volume of plays in 1902, containing two very different dramas: *A Tale of a Town* and *An Enchanted Sea*. The latter work was first produced by the Players' Club at the Antient Concert Rooms, Dublin, April 18, 1904.

Plot

Act I

At the old family estate of Fonthill, situated on the Irish west coast, Mrs. Rachel Font wields the sceptre in her own ruthless way. From a modest position as a peasant's daughter she has made her way into society by means of a cleverly planned marriage. When the play opens Mrs. Font's dominating position is threatened, however, by the fact that both her husband and her son are dead, so that the estate has come to belong to her young nephew, Guy Font. But Mrs. Font is the boy's guardian and in that capacity she is still in a position to feather her own nest.

Trying to arrange a fashionable marriage between her daughter Agnes and Lord Mask, a young, highly educated friend of the family, Mrs. Font will stick at nothing to get rid of the lawful owner of Fonthill who stands between her and her ambition. Tradition has it that "one of the first Lord Masks married a sea fairie. He brought her to Mask Castle, where she lived in an upper room of a tower. But she never could rest there, because it was not

by the sea. So she was always coming down here to Fonthill and haunting the coast." One day, legend goes on to say, "this sea fairie went back to the sea, and was never heard of again".

When the curtain rises she has, however, just been seen at Mask Castle, and it is rumoured among the superstitious inhabitants of the coast that the present owner of the castle will be the last Lord Mask. Like the sea fairie from whom he is believed to be descended, Lord Mask cannot live at his own castle because it is too inland. So he comes down to Fonthill to be near the ocean and to meet his young friend Guy, who has lived so long by the sea that it has become part of his being. Having lost his parents at an early age, this strange boy has been reared among the peasants who have taught him their language and initiated him into their primitive customs and beliefs. Nature has endowed Guy with a strange second sight that stirs up in him such beautiful visions of the ocean that he is looked upon by his noble partner, Lord Mask, as the timeless genius of the sea.

Guy's strong hold on the young lord threatens, however, to upset Mrs. Font's ambitious plans. She starts speaking ill of the boy before Mask and her own daughter. Insinuating that Guy was sent down from school for drowning his school-fellow, Mrs. Font hopes to put Mask on his guard against his young playmate who keeps drawing him to the sea and to the sea fairie whose willing instrument he is. Lord Mask refuses, however, to give credit to such a preposterous accusation and is warned by Mrs. Font that Guy will do to him—"what he has done before".

At the same time Mrs. Font tries to persuade her daughter that Guy is a changeling occupying the place of the real Guy, whom the fairies have taken. According to Mrs. Font, Guy "is one of those evil spirits, the Fomors, who haunt the land and seek human victims for the sea".

To save Lord Mask, Mrs. Font resorts to a dangerous scheme. Murder is in her mind as she mutters the sinister warning that brings the act to an end: "Those who belong to the sea should go back to the sea."

Act II

Guy takes his friend Mask to the mysterious sea-caves at Fonthill, and the young lord is deeply impressed by the splendid world of Manannan, the Celtic sea-god. Mask is taken in by the boy's visions because they seem to answer his own Hellenistic dream which has hitherto failed to materialize. "Your life of vision," he tells Guy, "has awakened for me the genius of the Antique! ... Your genius has made me see in Ireland my dream of old Greece. ... We both found our lesson book in the sea. ... The enchanted sea of Hellas taught me to find an enchanted sea." His last words are echoed by Guy speaking in subdued reverie: "This is an enchanted sea."

But their plans for a "Celtic Revival" are soon interrupted by Guy's guardian. To secure the fortune and to save the young lord from what she considers to be his evil spirit, Mrs. Font no longer hesitates to get rid of the lawful owner of Fonthill. Pretending affection for Guy, she suggests that the boy show her the sea-caves —alone! In vain does Agnes plead with her mother not to carry out her plans the true purpose of which she alone suspects. Headed by Guy, who is only too anxious to please his aunt, Mrs. Font sets out on her sinister errand—"to give a sea-fairie to the sea-caves".

Act III

The action takes place outside the entrance to the sea-caves. Mrs. Font's movements have been watched by two peasants planning to murder her because of her reckless treatment of the tenantry. From their hiding-place they could see Mrs. Font enter the caves with Guy and come back alone. Having found out her dreadful secret, the two peasants remain hidden behind the rocks biding their time.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Font is confronted with her daughter and Commander Lyle who is in love with Agnes. To secure an alibi Mrs. Font pretends that she has sent Guy up to fetch her a shawl because she felt chilly in the caves. But before long Mrs. Font is driven out of her positions. To begin with, Lord Mask brings back

the cap that Guy had been wearing when he was last seen with his aunt. "He gave it to me from the sea. ... He seemed as if he wanted to speak, but he faded away into a receding wave. ... I saw the cap floating near me, and as I knelt down to take it, he rose and gave it to me from the sea. ... I can never leave it (the sea) again. It is an enchanted sea! ... He stood between me and the shadows ..."

Although Mrs. Font is quite upset by Lord Mask's evidence, she makes bold enough to suggest once more that he marry her daughter. "If by some ill luck he (Guy) is dead, would you not like to live always in this beautiful demesne by the sea? You might then very easily make it yours." But this time Mrs. Font has aimed too high. Lord Mask suddenly realizes why she has always hated Guy. "Mrs. Font—I understand you at last. Now I know why everyone fears you. I begin to fear you myself for the first time in my life."

Left alone with her daughter, Mrs. Font uses all her will-power to force Agnes to yield to her plans. "I tell you, child, I would willingly bear the pains of hell, if only I could see my daughter married to a lord." Horrified at her mother's wickedness, Agnes refuses to obey her. There follows a long dispute which is finally interrupted by the reappearance of the two peasants. They are now in a position to prove that Guy has been murdered and Mrs. Font is caught in her own trap. "Your life of wickedness is stopped at last. ... We shall be avenged on you, Rachel Font. When we next meet, you will be in the dock, and we will hang you."

Act IV

A prisoner in her own house, Mrs. Font has not given up all hope to unite Agnes and Lord Mask. But all her scheming comes to an abrupt end at the sudden news of Mask's tragic death. Driven mad by the loss of Guy and haunted by his voice, Mask has gone back to the sea. He continues to look for the boy until one day, standing on the rocks where once he had seen his dead friend, the young lord is overwhelmed by a big wave and carried out to sea by the undertow. "The sea fairy was at Mask Castle indeed", is Mrs. Font's only comment as she stands paralysed by this final

blow. Beaten at her own game, she retreats to that part of the hall which Guy has turned into a gymnasium. As the police come to arrest her, they find that she has anticipated events by hanging herself from the landing of the great staircase of Fonthill. It turns out that the rope round her neck is the same that Guy used for a swing. So in the end the dead boy has had his revenge.

Taking Agnes under his wing, Commander Lyle pronounces the moral of the play: "This lonely sea was suited to the visionaries who have passed with their visions away. ... You who have awakened to real life, can find no place here."

Theme

The *leitmotif* of *An Enchanted Sea* is, as the title indicates, the fascination of the sea and the hypnotic influence it exerts upon the human mind. Thus the very theme of Martyn's drama invites comparison with Ibsen's *The Lady from the Sea.* Because in this play, too, the attraction of the sea is felt as a secret undercurrent from the very beginning of the drama. In Martyn's own words: "*The Lady from the Sea* gives expression to that yearning and enchantment which the ocean has for certain natures. An enchanted sea! ... The illimitable Atlantic with all its mystery and beauty calls to us. ... And Ibsen likewise is haunted by the same yearning beauty. Far away, exiled in inland Munich, he craves for the sea, and when in 1887 he returns to it, he gives vent to his enthusiasm and all his homesickness in this exquisite play, *The Lady from the Sea.*"[1]

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[1] Martyn papers, quoted Denis Gywnn, *op. cit.*, pp. 146–147. Cf. Martyn's preface to H. B. O'Hanlon's drama *The All-Alone*, published in 1919. "*The All-Alone* is a drama of the sea. Its idea is the vague charm and longing which the sight of the ocean and the phantasmal life on board sailing-ships awaken in the human heart. The fatality which results from an overmastering obsession by this, or any other mental passion, is more deadly than that from animal passion. In it lies material for the most awful tragedy." (Preface p. VII.)

Naturally the theme as such was by no means monopolized by the Northern playwright. "If objection be made to 'The Enchanted Sea' as a reflection of 'The Lady from the Sea,'" Weygandt writes in his book on the Irish drama, "it can be replied that the call of the sea that may not be resisted is as old as the heart of man. Sea fairies, mermaids and mermen, and the voice of the waters tugging as irresistibly on the tired spirit as the undertow on the body tired with long swimming, are in Gaelic literature from the beginning, and before Mr. Martyn had written of the sea enchantment it had lent its charm to many of the stories of 'Fiona Macleod.'"[1] True, but the point is that there seem to be very few Irish *plays* dealing with this particular theme. Drawing attention to Synge's *Riders to the Sea* and the drama under discussion, Bourgeois comes to the following conclusion: "To speak only of the Irish school itself, we know only of two sea-tragedies: *The Racing Lug*, by 'Seamus O'Cuisin,' and *The Storm*, by Hugh Barden."[2] Under these circumstances it is hard to overestimate the importance of *The Lady from the Sea* as a literary source of inspiration to both Martyn and Synge.[3] But here as elsewhere Ibsen's originality is to be found not so much in the selection of a particular subject as in his own highly individual treatment of the theme he chooses to dramatize.

Character

It is hardly to be expected that Martyn's drama of the sea with its melodramatic action and poor psychology should be of any particular interest to the student of the author's indebtedness to

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[1] Weygandt, *op. cit.*, pp. 85–86.

[2] Bourgeois, *op. cit.*, p. 159, note. He might, perhaps, have added Yeats' *The Shadowy Waters*.

[3] See the present writer's analysis of Synge's plays, particularly *Riders to the Sea*. This drama was published in 1904, the very year that saw the first performance of *An Enchanted Sea*.

Ibsen. The resemblance of subject is undeniable. Is there any similar connection between the two playwrights from the point of view of character drawing?

Examining the cast of Martyn's play, we may at once dismiss the majority of the characters as being either too vague or too stereotyped to merit individual discussion. In fact, the only two persons that need detain us here are Guy, the owner of Fonthill, and Mrs. Rachel Font, his aunt and guardian. The latter is undoubtedly Martyn's most powerful woman character. Here the misogynist tendency, noticeable in the early portrait of Carden Tyrrell's wife in *The Heather Field*, suddenly becomes predominant. As a character Mrs. Rachel Font is obviously conceived very much on the same lines as some of Ibsen's most dominating women like Rebekka, Hedda Gabler and Hilde Wangel. Naturally Martyn's heroine cannot stand comparison with any of these complicated characters. For it cannot be denied that the fine psychological qualities which one associates with a successful literary portrait are as conspicuously absent from the rather monotonous study of Mrs. Font as they are present in the Ibsenian trio mentioned above. But Martyn's heroine is nevertheless intimately related to this group of strong-willed women. They are all driven by an almost hysterical thirst for power and a fatal desire of playing with other people's lives until suddenly things take a new turn and they are caught in the network of their own scheming. Having staked everything on one card—and lost, Mrs. Font, like another Rebekka or Hedda Gabler, rises to the occasion and eludes justice by becoming her own executioner.

If objection be made that these parallels offer no conclusive evidence of foreign influence, it is interesting to observe that many years later Martyn again exploited almost exactly the same Ibsenian pattern. As will appear from the chapter dealing with *Grangecolman*, the author's pitiless study of Catharine Devlin turns out to be even more closely modelled on the Norwegian prototype.

Then there is the young boy Guy Font. He is an ambiguous character, naive and precocious, young and old at the same time—a living link between this world and the manifestations of the otherworld. Primarily this strange child, whose spirit is lost in the waves of the sea, no doubt embodies the author's nostalgic vision of a dateless dream-world, built up on the ancient glories of the Gael

and the Greek. The fact that the boy also reflects Martyn's own intense love of Irish scenery merely adds to the strange fascination of this lovable character.

But this alone does not explain the complex nature of Martyn's young hero. What makes Guy Font such an intriguing character is above all his mysterious background and the way in which he displays his supernatural powers. Brought up among the peasants of the west coast of Ireland, the boy has got the sea literally in his blood. So much so that Mrs. Font actually believes him to be a "changeling" belonging to the realm of the sea people.[1] Not only does Martyn stress Guy's intimate relationship with the sea. He has also endowed him with a secret power of bringing other people under his spell, opening their eyes to the beauties of his own world of sea enchantment.

This is precisely where the Ibsenian influence comes most clearly to the fore. Bearing in mind Martyn's special fondness for *The Lady from the Sea*, which he once called a "beautiful prose poem drama",[2] it is hardly surprising that he should have been sufficiently impressed by the appearance of the mysterious stranger in that play to realize that he could use him for his own purpose in the shape of Guy Font. Thus Mask is held by Guy's supernatural power in much the same way as Ellida Wangel, "the lady from the sea", is captivated by the hypnotic power of the Stranger. Ibsen's heroine tells her husband, Dr. Wangel, of the seaman's "unfathomable power over my soul".[3] — Similarly Guy's tutor speaks of his "extraordinary powers for a boy only fifteen years old",[4] adding that "he manages to impose his will on people ... Persons of the same temperament as his".[5] And Mrs. Font asks Lord Mask: "Why is he always leading you away to the sea?"[6]

The fascination of the Stranger and the spell of the sea make Ellida restless in her own home, which lies too far from the coast. Her husband is full of sympathy: "You cannot endure your sur-

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[1] *An Enchanted Sea*, Act I, pp. 150–151.
[2] Martyn papers, quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 144.
[3] *The Lady from the Sea*, Act II, p. 235.
[4] *An Enchanted Sea*, Act I, p. 125.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 130–131.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 140.

roundings here. The mountains oppress you and weigh upon your spirits. There is not light enough for you here—the horizon is not wide enough—the air not strong and stimulating enough for you. ELLIDA. There you are quite right. Night and day, winter and summer, it is upon me—this haunting home-sickness for the sea."[1]

Turning to Martyn's play, we are struck by a similar development of character. For Guy, and all that he symbolizes, makes it equally impossible for Lord Mask to remain at home: "Oh! I cannot live down there at Mask. It is too inland.[2] ... I should always feel lonely away from the sea.[3] ... I can never leave it again. It is an enchanted sea![4] ... Poor Guy—I feel I am with him only when near the sea.[5] ... I hear one calling me.[6] ... I must never more leave the sea.[7] ... he is still with me ... In the wistful ocean."[8]

Thus Martyn's young hero, like Ibsen's Stranger, may be looked upon as a kind of personification of the forces of Nature. "That man is like the sea."[9] In these words Ellida Wangel sums up the power of the Stranger. — "Is he not a genius of the sea?"[10] Lord Mask exclaims in sheer admiration for his young friend. The personification is enhanced by Mrs. Font's sinister remark that she looks upon the boy as "the imp of the sea fairie", whom she must get rid of, because in her opinion "those who belong to the sea, should go back to the sea".[11]

Although the last sentence has a very special meaning, it would be futile to deny that these words are but a verbal echo of Dr. Wangel's pleading with his own wife in *The Lady from the Sea*: "... the poor sick child must go to its own home again ... somewhere by the open sea—."[12] To make the connection even more

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[1] *The Lady from the Sea*, Act II, p. 223.
[2] *An Enchanted Sea*, Act I, p. 131.
[3] *Ibid.*, Act III, p. 179.
[4] *Ibid.*, Act III, p. 180.
[5] *Ibid.*, Act IV, p. 192.
[6] *Ibid.*, Act IV, p. 193.
[7] *Ibid.*, Act IV, p. 193.
[8] *Ibid.*, Act IV, p. 194.
[9] *The Lady from the Sea*, Act III, p. 273.
[10] *An Enchanted Sea*, Act I, p. 133.
[11] *Ibid.*, Act I, p. 152.
[12] *The Lady from the Sea*, Act II, p. 224.

convincing one might quote the scene in which Dr. Wangel confides to his friend that "Ellida belongs to the sea-folk. ... Have you not noticed that the people who live out by the open sea are like a race apart? They seem almost to live the life of the sea itself."[1] ... Finally, "Ellida wants to go home again; home to the sea."[2]

There are also some interesting parallels between Guy Font and Ibsen's "little stranger-boy" Eyolf. The correspondence, however, is mainly technical and had better be dealt with in the following section.

Summing up, one might say that the character drawing of Martyn's drama clearly reveals the author's indebtedness to Ibsen. Although the main action of *An Enchanted Sea* has comparatively little in common with *The Lady from the Sea*, the fact remains that Martyn's principal characters are both conceived and interpreted in terms that point to Ibsen's "beautiful prose poem drama" of the sea and the fascination it exerts upon the human soul.

Technique

The present investigation has already drawn attention to Martyn's indebtedness to Ibsen from the point of view of scenic method. In this respect *An Enchanted Sea* is a case in point. To begin with, Martyn's drama has a strong balladic atmosphere which is clearly reminiscent of some of the plays of the Norwegian master, notably *The Lady from the Sea.*

Let us consider for a moment the way in which the Irish dramatist introduces the story about the mermaid. In the very opening pages the reader learns all about the strange marriage that took place long ago between the first Lord Mask and the sea fairie. As told above she soon feels imprisoned at the castle and longs to go

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[1] *The Lady from the Sea*, Act IV, p. 288.

[2] *Ibid.*, Act IV, p. 311.

back to the sea. This turns out to be the dilemma of the present Lord Mask who also pines away at his home because it is "too inland" and he must be near the sea.

If the reader now turns to *The Lady from the Sea* he will be surprised to find exactly the same method of exposition. As a matter of fact the very first scene offers a striking parallel to Martyn's use of the sea fairie. For here we are confronted with the artist Ballested who is busy painting a picture which he intends to call "The Mermaid's End". This is his own description of the work:

> "By the rock in the foreground here, I mean to have a half-dead mermaid lying. ... She has strayed in from the sea, and can't find her way out again. So she lies here dying by inches in the brackish waters, you understand."[1]

Thus, in both plays, the story about the mermaid is introduced in order to symbolize the fate of one of the main characters.

Speaking about symbolism, it is interesting to observe that Martyn, as previously in *Maeve*, adopts Ibsen's habit, when one of his characters is attracted by another, of making the latter symbolic. Brand—Gerd (the Ice Church); Ellida Wangel—the Stranger (the Sea); Solness—Hilde (Youth); Eyolf—the Rat Wife (Death).

The Irish playwright, it will be remembered, follows a similar pattern in his drama of the sea. Both Lord Mask and Guy Font are irresistibly drawn to the sea fairie and Death. Mrs. Font's words: "The sea fairie is waiting to take him"[2] (Lord Mask) are but an echo of Allmer's remark in *Little Eyolf* about his son and the Rat Wife: "She has drawn him down into the depths—that you may be sure of, dear."[3]

Furthermore, Martyn's "white lady" who appears at Mask Castle to foretell the death of the last owner is used symbolically in a way that comes very close to Ibsen's treatment of the "white horses" of *Rosmersholm*. In this play, too, the "ghosts of the manor" appear whenever someone of the family is going to die.

It is also worthy of note that in both plays indomitable natural forces are at work. In *Rosmersholm* the fatal mill-stream, whose

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[1] *The Lady from the Sea*, Act I, p. 170.

[2] *An Enchanted Sea*, Act IV, p. 202.

[3] *Little Eyolf*, Act II, p. 67.

roaring waters are heard in the distance throughout the action, has all the grandeur of a natural force which relentlessly sucks down the inhabitants of Rosmersholm, exactly as the sea does with some of the characters in *An Enchanted Sea*. Thus both plays are instinct with the same atmosphere of inevitability, brought about by the power of Nature and accentuated by visions, signs and portents of impending doom.

There are many other technical links between the master and the pupil. At the beginning of *An Enchanted Sea* the Irish playwright uses one of Ibsen's favourite tricks in order to prevent too rapid an exposition, namely a sudden break in the action. By skilfully interrupting the dialogue at a vital point, for instance when a secret is about to be disclosed, Ibsen manages to invest his plays with an atmosphere of suspense which is particularly important in his later works to conceal their lack of outward action.

In Martyn's drama the same device is put to effective use in the very opening scene which immediately strikes the right note of suspense.

YELVERTON. But why should they say he will be the last Lord Mask?
AGNES (*hesitatingly*). Because—well, because the tradition is that this sea fairie went back to the sea, and was never heard of again.
YELVERTON. Oh—they think she has now reappeared to—
AGNES. What steamer is that just come round the point?[1]

Turning to *The Lady from the Sea*, it is rather amusing to find that the third act has a similar interruption, caused by a steamer.

ELLIDA. Oh, I feel so thoroughly well. I feel so unspeakably happy! So safe! So safe— (*Looks out to the left.*) What large steamer is that coming in?[2]

Contemporary critics seem to have been puzzled by the character of Guy Font. One of them, Frank Fay, went to the length of asserting that Martyn should never have drawn the portrait of the little boy at all "because, after all, a play ought to be capable of being acted, and this character is almost impossible of realisation."[3]

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[1] *An Enchanted Sea*, Act I, pp. 126–127.

[2] *The Lady from the Sea*, Act III, p. 253.

[3] *United Irishman*, November 4, 1904, quoted Sister Marie-Thérèse Courtney, *Edward Martyn and the Irish Theatre* (New York 1956), p. 96.

Personally I find this piece of criticism grotesquely wide of the mark. For Guy is the very pivot of the play. Without him the author might just as well have given up the whole project of writing *An Enchanted Sea.* But I think Martyn had a special reason for making a child the prime mover of his play. With Ibsen at his finger-tips, the Irish dramatist must have been struck by the frequency with which children appear in the works of his great forerunner. This is not the place to deal with them all. Suffice it to mention only two, the girl Hedvig in *The Wild Duck* and the young boy who lent his name to one of Ibsen's last dramas, i.e. *Little Eyolf.* It is significant that in both these plays a child acts as the pivot of the plot.[1]

Looking at Martyn's young hero from a technical point of view, I feel convinced that Ibsen's effective use of the child as centre of the action must have been an irresistible inducement to the Irish playwright to try his hand at a similar task. For Guy Font too, is the mainspring of the dramatic machinery. Like Eyolf he is fascinated by the supernatural. Ibsen's Rat Wife, who draws little Eyolf into the depths, reappears in Martyn's play in the shape of the sea fairie who is instrumental in bringing Guy Font to an untimely end in the waves of the sea.

As in Ibsen's drama, the tragedy occurs at an early stage. But the boys are stronger than death. From their watery graves both Eyolf and Guy keep haunting the other members of the house. Here is a passage in *Little Eyolf*:

> ASTA ... Oh, my dear Alfred—let them rest—those who are gone. ...
> ALLMERS — Yes, let them rest. (*Wringing his hands.*) But those who are gone—it is they that won't let us rest, Asta. Neither day nor night[2]

In *An Enchanted Sea* the death of Guy Font draws the following comment from Mrs. Font's daughter:

> And so in death he is stronger for us than in life.[3]

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[1] The present author saw *The Wild Duck* and *Little Eyolf* during the Ibsen Festival in Oslo 1956. The competent interpretation of the extremely difficult parts of the two children would, I think, have surprised Frank Fay, had he been there, and made him less inclined to look upon the character of Guy Font as being "almost impossible of realisation".

[2] *Little Eyolf*, Act II, p. 81.

[3] *An Enchanted Sea*, Act IV, p. 195.

Thus Martyn's young hero may be said to dominate the scene in practically the same way as the character of little Eyolf.

Finally, it is worth observing that *An Enchanted Sea* ends on a note of dramatic irony that the reader of, say, *The Wild Duck* or *Hedda Gabler* immediately recognizes as typically Ibsenian. The Irish dramatist prepares his readers for the death of Mrs. Font in much the same way as Ibsen does in dealing with the suicide of Hedda Gabler. Thus the fatal swing that ironically turns into a gibbet towards the end of Martyn's drama is hinted at throughout the action in a manner that closely resembles Ibsen's treatment of the pistol with which Hedda Gabler kills herself when the game is up.

These are the main parallels between the plays under discussion. The haunting power of *The Lady from the Sea* took possession of the Irish playwright. He found that he could use the sea atmosphere of Ibsen's drama for his own purpose. But in so doing, he added a new element, i.e. the legends of Manannan and Poseidon, the sea god of the Irish and Greek mythologies which are said to be akin.

Another difference between the two plays is to be found in Ibsen's famous retrospective technique. Much as he admired "the triumphant construction" of Ibsen's plays, the iron linking of the scenes and the gradual unravelling of the past, the Irish dramatist apparently did not even try to imitate this aspect of Ibsen's dramatic method in any of his own plays. None of them are constructed backwards like, for instance, *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm* and, to some extent, *The Lady from the Sea*.[1]

Furthermore, Martyn does not share the Norwegian's predilection for the sententious phrase, which is quite in keeping with the didactic element of some of Ibsen's plays. *The Lady from the Sea*, for instance, ends with a kind of magic formula, i.e. "freedom under responsibility" which Martyn no doubt would have repudiated, just as it is repudiated by many modern critics. Unlike his great fore-

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[1] A Norwegian authority on Ibsen points out that in his opinion the playwright's "principle of advancing through going backwards to revelations of the past is more than technique — it is the expression of his view of life, his profound belief in the importance of the past". (Francis Bull, *Ibsen. The Man and the Dramatist* (Oxford 1954), p. 12.

runner, the Irish dramatist does not want to ask questions or raise any problems. It is significant that Doctor Wangel's psychological cure of his wife in *The Lady from the Sea* did not suit Martyn and the lonely visionaries of his play "who have passed with their visions away". But in creating his own enchanted ocean, he could not resist the incantatory power of Ibsen's drama of the sea.

CHAPTER V

Grangecolman

There is an interval of exactly ten years between Edward Martyn's second volume of plays, containing *The Tale of a Town* and *An Enchanted Sea*, and the publication of *Grangecolman* in 1912. This drama was among the earliest productions of the Independent Theatre Company. It is a play of cold realism sometimes lapsing into melodrama.

Plot

Act I

Grangecolman is an ancient country seat near Dublin. The present owner, Michael Colman, originally belonged to the Quinns, a well-to-do family who always "held their heads high commercially". He became one of the Colmans of Grangecolman by marrying the heiress, an alliance that brought money into this branch of old Irish gentry. At the death of his wife, Colman, who is now a man of sixty, was left with only one daughter, Catharine, to look after the house. This young girl soon became engrossed with the feminist movement, training herself for a medical career. She is now married to Lucius Devlin, an incorrigible idler who once caught her fancy as an agitator for women's rights. Catharine fails, however, in the medical profession, partly because people "have no confidence in female doctors".

Let down by her husband, who goes on cherishing barren ideals instead of taking up a decent job, Catharine reluctantly finds that

they are both thrown upon her father's resources for their future existence. Unwilling to accept the duties of her home, Catharine brings Miss Clare Farquhar into the house to look after Colman and help him to carry on his studies of heraldry and genealogy which form his intellectual pastime. This turns out to be a successful arrangement as far as Colman and his young amanuensis are concerned. They soon find happiness in their mutual work. Neglected by his own daughter, Colman cannot help conceiving a middle-aged passion for his responsive protégée.

On her return to Grangecolman, Catharine is struck by the friendly atmosphere of the home that used to be a prison to her. But very soon she becomes aware of Colman's true feelings for Miss Farquhar. Finding herself supplanted in the life of her father by his secretary, Catharine immediately sets about to put an end to this unexpected love-affair. She persuades her father that she is beginning to take an interest in his work. Her next step is to inform Miss Farquhar that her services are no longer required. From now on she herself is going to be Mr. Colman's secretary.

Act II

Catharine tells her husband that she has put an end to Miss Farquhar's career. In vain does Lucius try to persuade his wife that in dismissing the secretary she is only increasing Colman's infatuation for the young girl. Catharine, however, tells her father that he must choose between herself and Miss Farquhar whose presence in the house is bound to bring misfortune to them all. In order to frighten the superstitious old man into obedience Catharine insinuates that she has already had "the usual warning" from the white lady that haunts Grangecolman. As if to emphasize her words, Horan, the butler, is heard outside the room crying for help. He enters in a hurry telling everybody that he has just seen the family ghost. Colman is very near total collapse when the "ghost" suddenly materializes in the shape of Miss Farquhar dressed in white for dinner. In an interview with the girl, Colman explains to her that his nerves are unhinged because of the "dreadful tales hanging about the old place". Feeling that he will be lost without

Miss Farquhar, Colman makes bold to propose to the girl who is only too happy to accept the hand of her "master". The act closes on the couple announcing their union. Catharine stares at them as if struck by lightning.

Act III

Colman's daughter is planning to prevent the marriage between her father and Miss Farquhar. Left alone with the young girl, Catharine suffers the humiliation of being openly denounced as a failure. In a final effort to defeat her young opponent, Mrs. Devlin resorts to a desperate scheme. Knowing that Miss Farquhar does not believe in phantoms, Catharine decides to play the family ghost in order to provoke her rival to fire at "the white lady of Grange-colman". Shortly afterwards a bullet from Miss Farquhar's revolver puts a melodramatic end to the story as well as to the empty life of Catharine Devlin.

Theme

In one of his books of travel J. M. Synge drew attention to a dramatic theme that lay hidden in the Irish countryside waiting for the competent explorer. "Everyone," he writes in *Wicklow*, "is used in Ireland to the tragedy that is bound up with the lives of farmers and fishing people." But, he adds, "if a playwright chose to go through the Irish country houses he would find material, it is likely, for many gloomy plays that would turn on the dying away of these old families, and on the lives of the one or two delicate girls that are left so often to represent a dozen hearty men who were alive a generation or two ago."[1]

[1] J. M. Synge, *In Wicklow, West Kerry and Connemara* (Dublin 1911), pp. 52–53.

Synge's own literary activities, it is true, centred almost exclusively on folk drama. But some of Martyn's plays, notably *Grangecolman*, show that Synge was perfectly right in calling attention to the native material for domestic drama. On the other hand, it is extremely unlikely that Martyn's achievement in the field would have met with Synge's approval. The point is, however, that Martyn was bent on showing the possibilities of another kind of drama, a drama both Irish and cosmopolitan.

The main theme of *Grangecolman* is the socially maladjusted woman. It is a story of a *femme fatale* and the ruinous part she plays in the lives of other people. This theme is treated in a way that immediately invites comparison with the only misogynist play that Ibsen ever wrote—*Hedda Gabler*.

Character

A study of *Grangecolman* reveals certain interesting parallels between some of Martyn's characters and those of Ibsen. Thus Colman himself is partly traced on the figure of Rosmer in *Rosmersholm*. In both plays we are confronted with "the quiet student" who sits musing over his genealogical tables and historical collections, assisted only by an attractive young woman who has come to the old manor. They fall in love with each other. But the man is under the spell of the haunted house and their love is thwarted by "the family ghost".

Here the parallelism ends. Colman is something of an upstart, well aware of the power of money. Rosmer, on the other hand, is an idealist who wants to ennoble the minds of his countrymen. Besides, the Irish landowner is as reactionary in his social outlook as Rosmer, the aristocrat, is liberal.

Looking at the cast of Martyn's drama, Catharine Devlin is, however, the figure that most readily invites comparison with some of Ibsen's leading characters. Rebekka West and Hilde Wangel for

instance, with their innate love of power, will stop at nothing to attain their end. The very fact that their road to success crosses the threshold of another woman's home merely adds to the thrill of the hunt.

One must, however, look elsewhere in order to find Martyn's chief source of inspiration. For Catharine Devlin is no doubt primarily modelled on Hedda Gabler, Ibsen's famous study of a *femme fatale*. Not only do they share an all-absorbing passion for dominating other people's lives. They also betray the same negative attitude towards married life, finding compensation in a masculine craving for action.

Unsatisfied by their partners, who both cut a poor figure, Hedda Gabler as well as Catharine Devlin find a dangerous outlet for their subdued passions. Soon the negative and the sterile that characterizes both heroines turns into sadism and the stage is set for the cruel game of cat and mouse.

Hedda Gabler spoils the union between her former lover, a dissipated scholar, and his guardian angel, whereas Catharine Devlin makes a desperate attempt to put an end to her father's pathetic romance with a young girl who threatens to upset her plans. Ibsen's heroine, like Martyn's, feels that life is slipping from her. Little by little this same feeling of having lost their footing in life begins to tell on their nerves so that in both plays the heroine is clearly moving on the border of insanity.

Thus Hedda Gabler and Catharine Devlin are birds of a feather in more than one way. They are both consumed by a desperate passion for life, i.e. the free and beautiful life of their visions which form such a striking contrast to their own dreary existence. Hampered by a sense of mental discomfort, they fail, however, to find a positive outlet for their intellectual capacity.[1] Under these circumstances it is only natural that the enlightened lady doctor of Martyn's play should hate being reduced to inactivity. A stranger to her own family, Catharine Devlin, like Hedda Gabler, finds herself lost in a social vacuum. The crisis is accentuated by the fact that both

[1] Hedda Gabler: "I often think there is only one thing in the world I have any turn for. ... Boring myself to death." (Act II, pp. 81–82.) Cf. Catharine Devlin's outburst: "I am hopeless and weary, and if this crowning injury comes to me, I don't care what I do." (*Grangecolman*, Act II, p. 25.)

women are equally disappointed in their husbands who fail to live up to their ideals. Having lost their illusions of a carefree independent life, both heroines are entirely thrown upon their own resources in their revolt against the outer world, a world that could not possibly be less congenial to their temperament.

In this heavy atmosphere the morbid and the destructive about the two women gets the better of them. When all other roads seem to be closed, that of the parasite is always left open. As their dreams fail to materialize, both Hedda Gabler and Catharine Devlin seek compensation in a desperate struggle for self-assertion. Frustrated in their ambitions, the two heroines deliberately set about ruining the lives of their competitors. For why should other people enjoy a happiness that they themselves can never hope to find?

In each play the heroine is confronted with a rivalling woman who falls an easy victim to the tricks of her relentless persecutor. Thus we have on the one side Hedda Gabler's erotic devilries which bring about the estrangement of a loving couple, on the other Catharine Devlin's wicked designs on her own father and on the woman he intends to marry. The parallel between the two plays is emphasized by the fact that in the end Catharine Devlin, like Hedda Gabler, falls in her own trap with death as the only possible solution.

Ibsen's heroine, like Martyn's, behaves exactly like the dog in the manger. They both hate other women, especially those who find happiness in love. For love is a word that none of them seems able to understand or even let pass over their lips. Their dilemma is that of the unemployed wife trying to escape the monotony of an unsuccessful marriage. Everything that is important to Hedda and Catharine comes to nothing. Ibsen's neurotic heroine speaks of the ridiculous and the sordid lying like a curse on everything she touches.[1] Catharine Devlin, thwarted and tortured beyond endurance, rails at her father in the following outburst: "Oh! Will no one understand? Don't you see that nothing would really have mattered if things I had set my heart on had only prospered with me."[2]

Like Hedda Gabler, Martyn's heroine looks upon life with the eyes of an aesthete unable to endure the plebeian manners of her

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[1] *Hedda Gabler*, Act IV, p. 176.

[2] *Grangecolman*, Act II, p. 26.

fellow-creatures. "Yes, I've been a great enthusiast. There is no one who has had such enthusiasm for what is lofty and great and beautiful in life as I. I am proud of it, and also of my contempt for the sort of wisdom of such as you."[1]

As stated above neither the eccentric visions of Hedda Gabler nor the beautiful though self-centred dreams of Catharine Devlin come true and evil and hatred has the last word. Thus the inadequacy of a narrow aesthetic outlook on life is demonstrated along much the same lines in both plays. And yet it is equally clear that this very vision, this glimpse of beauty and happiness, inspires the reader with a certain amount of pity for the two heroines who otherwise would have appeared merely morbid and destructive.

Furthermore, it is significant that both heroines confess to having overestimated the intellectual capacity of their partners. Witness the following conversation:

HEDDA. I see no reason why he should not one day come to the front, after all.

BRACK (*looks at her hesitatingly*). I thought that you, like every one else, expected him to attain the highest distinction.

HEDDA (*with an expression of fatigue*). Yes, so I did.[2]

Turning to Martyn, the corresponding passage runs as follows:

CATHARINE — What matter what he did or didn't, when he didn't do the real thing.

COLMAN. You mean what you expected of him. Ah, you thought him a much greater man than he was, Catharine.

CATHARINE. I did. ... Besides his University course was so brilliant.[3]

Hedda Gabler refuses to accept the fact that she has been supplanted in the love of her rejected admirer by another woman strong enough to offer resistance. Furthermore, she will not tolerate her rival's attempt at reclaiming the dissipated scholar as she herself wishes "to have power to mould a human destiny".[4] In a similar way Catharine Devlin finds herself superseded in the affections of her father by another woman. Like Hedda, Martyn's heroine

[1] *Grangecolman*, Act III, p. 37.
[2] *Hedda Gabler*, Act II, pp. 69–70.
[3] *Grangecolman*, Act I, pp. 7–8.
[4] *Hedda Gabler*, Act II, p. 114.

starts intriguing in order to spoil her rival's love romance. Like Hedda, she is finally caught in her own trap.

CATHARINE. All I know is that real life has somehow got near to me at last, and (*vehemently*) that I loathe it.[1]

With this should be compared Hedda Gabler's outburst towards the end of the drama:

HEDDA (*looks up—with an expression of loathing*). That too! Oh, what curse is it that makes everything I touch turn ludicrous and mean?[2]

Thus the embarrassing position of Hedda and Catharine is gradually exposed until at the end of the two plays the tormented souls of the heroines cry out in utter loneliness. Feeling nothing but disgust for life, both Hedda and Catharine find peace in death which seems to offer them the final morbid thrill.

Technique

Grangecolman may be looked upon as a final example of Martyn's careful adaptation of some of Ibsen's most characteristic technical devices.

The very setting of the Irishman's play strikes a typical Ibsenian note. For the scene of the action is a lonely old country seat haunted by a family ghost. Although the supernatural element is introduced by the Irish dramatist in a crude, melodramatic manner, it is hard not to think of *Rosmersholm*, to say nothing about *Ghosts*, as a possible source of inspiration. As a matter of fact, Martyn was particularly fond of *Rosmersholm* which he looked upon as "one of the master's finest and most absorbing studies in psychological action. ... The old Norwegian country house which gives its name to the tragedy fills the background with its ghostly, still life".[3]

[1] *Grangecolman*, Act III, p. 41.

[2] *Hedda Gabler*, Act IV, p. 176.

[3] Martyn papers, quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, pp. 147–148.

Examining the stage directions of *Grangecolman*, we find that they simply abound in minute observations of a kind that immediately recalls Ibsen's novelizing method of introducing his characters to the reading public by way of visual suggestion. There is also the same tendency of stressing the relationship between a person's outward appearance and his character. To take only one example, this is how Catharine Devlin's husband is presented:

> "He is a tall, slightly built man, with marked and rather delicate features, hair rather long, an untrimmed beard, and spectacles. His clothes are ill-fitting, and his coat buttoned up to the throat suggests a person careful of himself. He is about thirty-five years of age."[1]

One of Ibsen's favourite technical inventions, originating no doubt from Scribe and the well-made play, is the habit of making his characters indulge in some kind of game that sums up the situation[2] while at the same time throwing the main plot into relief. A typical instance of the same technique is to be found in the last act of *Grangecolman:*

> MISS FARQUHAR. I must play, or else I shall feel gloomy.
> LUCIUS. Why not let us have a game of billiards? You beat me last time.
> MISS FARQUHAR. Very well. I will now give you your revenge.
> CATHARINE (*significantly*). Revenge is a dangerous word, Miss Farquhar.[3]

Even a brief examination of the stage-properties of *Grangecolman* reveals Martyn's indebtedness to Ibsen. Thus the reader is at once struck by the fact that a couple of revolvers form part of the plot in much the same way as General Gabler's pistols in *Hedda Gabler*. The Norwegian heroine's carefree handling of the dangerous weapon immediately suggests her *noli me tangere* attitude towards life and even led a critic to the ridiculous assumption that Hedda Gabler herself is, in fact, a pistol.[4]

Not only does the theme of the fatal fire-arms appear in both plays with the frequency of a *leitmotif*. Far more revealing is the

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[1] *Grangecolman*, Act I, p. 9.

[2] See e.g. *Catilina*, *Lady Inger*, *The Warriors of Helgeland*, *The Pretenders*, *The League of Youth*, *A Doll's House*, and *The Wild Duck*.

[3] *Grangecolman*, Act III, p. 39.

[4] Jennette Lee, *The Ibsen Secret* (New York 1907), pp. 26–27.

fact that Martyn follows Ibsen's method of introducing the theme at the very beginning of the drama to create an uncanny atmosphere and to prepare the reader for the final catastrophe. Thus there is a strong link between the first act of both plays and the last where death comes for the heroine who is silenced for ever by a bullet from the family pistol.

Considering for a moment Martyn's treatment of the landscape which played such a significant part in his earlier dramas, there is no denying the fact that the atmosphere of *Grangecolman* has much in common with the spirit of gloom that pervades some of Ibsen's finest plays. It is, I think, hardly a coincidence that the autumnal setting of *Hedda Gabler*, so congenial to a drama that deals with the decline and fall of a *femme fatale*, should have tempted Martyn to create a similar background of "the yellow leaf" for his own tragedy.

Once again, though with less skill, the Irish dramatist adopted Ibsen's clever habit of dragging in the landscape both by visual suggestion and by means of dialogue in which the scenery is brought to bear on the different characters of the play. A single example will illustrate this. In the first act of *Hedda Gabler* the heroine is caught unaware by her husband in a scene that gives an early glimpse of Hedda's true state of mind.

HEDDA (*walks about the room, raising her arms and clenching her hands as if in desperation. Then she flings back the curtains from the glass door, and stands there looking out. Presently* TESMAN *returns and closes the door behind him*).

TESMAN ... What are you looking at, Hedda?

HEDDA (*once more calm and mistress of herself*). I am looking at the leaves. They are so yellow—so withered.

TESMAN ... Well, you see, we are well into September now.

HEDDA (*again restless*). Yes, to think of it!—Already in—in September.[1]

Turning to *Grangecolman*, one need not study the play for long to notice the same romantic convention of relating the emotional life of the main characters to the surrounding landscape. As with Ibsen, illustrative action and dialogue combine to produce a vivid effect that sticks in the mind. This, for instance, is Martyn's heroine at the cross-roads:

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[1] *Hedda Gabler*, Act I, p. 25.

CATHARINE (*Goes to window at left and draws back the curtains. The moon shines in*). What a clear, beautiful night. (*Dreamily.*) Those hectic tints of autumn have faded under the frosty moon to a whiteness of death.

MISS FARQUHAR (*with awe*). Yes. How cold it looks outside.

CATHARINE. How peaceful to the heart that longs for rest.

MISS FARQUHAR. The trees—the lawn are frightfully still.

CATHARINE (*unfastening the window*). Come, let us walk out.

MISS FARQUHAR (*shrinks*). Oh, no. I couldn't bear it.

CATHARINE. Why couldn't you bear it?

MISS FARQUHAR (*shuddering*). I don't know. Your words—There is something ghastly about the whiteness of the night.[1]

In the light of what has already been said about Martyn's treatment of the landscape in his earlier plays, the above analysis seems to confirm the impression that Irish scenery was hardly the author's sole source of inspiration.

Furthermore, Martyn's close reliance upon Ibsen's scenic method is evidenced by the fact that *Grangecolman* is a highly selective drama. From plays like *Ghosts*, *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler* the Irish dramatist learned that a true tragedy had better not be stifled by an excessive number of actors. Like Ibsen's plays, *Grangecolman* passes as nearly as possible in solitude. Surrounded by only a handful of characters, Martyn's heroine, like Hedda Gabler, stands head and shoulders above the people around her.

Another technical peculiarity that links Martyn's drama with that of Ibsen is the tendency to reduce external action to a minimum in order to focus the reader's attention upon the inner drama, i.e. the drama of the human soul at a crisis. In *Hedda Gabler*, as well as in *Grangecolman*, we receive the heroine ripe for her undoing. For Martyn, like Ibsen, is mainly concerned with writing what may conveniently be called the fifth act of the drama.

It needs stressing that in both plays retribution is coming not from without but from within. *Grangecolman*, like *Hedda Gabler*, is the story of the biter bit. But, and this is an important difference between the two plays, Ibsen's heroine is a good loser. Her head proudly erect, Hedda Gabler turns away from "the banquet of life", to use her own high-flown expression. Catharine Devlin, on

[1] *Grangecolman*, Act III, pp. 36–37.

the other hand, merely adds to her register of sins by courting death in a way that ruins the lives of her own father and the woman he loves. Besides, in killing his heroine in full view of the audience, Martyn committed a crudity that would have shocked the author of *Hedda Gabler*.

As the previous discussion has shown, Martyn was a great admirer of *Rosmersholm*. From a technical point of view the author's indebtedness to this particular drama is evidenced in more than one way. At the very beginning of *Grangecolman* the intimacy between Colman and the young girl is suddenly exposed to Catharine as her father calls Miss Farquhar by her Christian name. This scene is evidently traced on a similar episode in *Rosmersholm* where Rosmer's love for Rebekka is hinted at in precisely the same way.[1]

Another technical resemblance between the two plays is the way in which the supernatural element that dominates both *Rosmersholm* and *Grangecolman* is given a realistic motivation. Thus Rebekka's white shawl and Miss Farquhar's white dinner dress serve the same purpose of providing a logical explanation of the ghostly disturbances at the two lonely country-houses.

What places *Grangecolman*, as compared with *Rosmersholm* and *Hedda Gabler*, on an altogether lower artistic level is precisely the sum of the Irishman's shortcomings as a playwright. These have already been dealt with in the above analysis and need not be enumerated again. It is to be regretted that in telling his story Martyn did not observe the great objectivity of the old master. No verdict is passed upon Rebekka West, nor on Hedda Gabler, whose complicated character and tragic fate cannot fail to stir our imagination.

The finely conceived portrait of Catharine Devlin on the other hand is unfortunately marred by Martyn's misogyny which at the end of the drama becomes so exaggerated as to rob the heroine of all human proportions. Whatever the author's intention, the fact remains that the desperate woman who welcomes death from her own pistol seems no more real than the phantoms which are said to haunt Grangecolman.

However, even in this play there is, as we have seen, more than one indication that Martyn tried to adopt Ibsen's method of com-

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[1] *Grangecolman*, Act I, p. 6. *Rosmersholm*, Act II, p. 62.

bining realism with poetry. But the Irishman's bias and lack of inspiration were too obvious for such efforts ever to be rewarded. That is why, in spite of the author's ambition, the heroine of *Grangecolman* remains a Hedda Gabler in miniature.

In *Rosmersholm*, as in most of Ibsen's plays, there is an ethical background, a constant questioning of current morality of which there is practically no evidence in the theatre of Edward Martyn. The Irish playwright does not want to "teach or prove anything", to quote a few words from J. M. Synge's attack upon the Northern master. Above all, being a devout Catholic, Martyn looks upon morality as something fixed once and for all, something that is not to be questioned, least of all in a work for the theatre.

And yet, when all is said there is no denying the fact that *Grangecolman* is of great interest to the student of the Literary Revival as a noteworthy attempt to introduce a new kind of drama, a drama both Irish and cosmopolitan. Of the three Irishmen behind the famous manifesto, quoted above, no one came closer than Edward Martyn to the gallant slogan of the Irish Literary Theatre: "Everywhere critics and writers, who wish for something better than the ordinary play of commerce, turn to Norway for an example and an inspiration."

CHAPTER VI

Conclusion

With the publication of the present study I have brought the first part of my investigation of Ibsen's influence upon the early Anglo-Irish drama to an end. To illustrate my thesis, I have chosen two dramatists who do not seem to have anything in common apart from the fact that they happened to belong to the same movement. The one, J. M. Synge, concealed his own indebtedness to Ibsen by making negative pronouncements on the works of the great Norwegian, the other, Edward Martyn, proved a devout Ibsenite both as playwright and dramatic critic.

Happily, we have Synge's own words for the fact that he had actually read and pondered Ibsen's dramas. In the preface to *The Tinker's Wedding*, the Irish writer takes stand against the dramaturgy of the Northern master. "The drama, like the symphony, does not teach or prove anything. Analysts with their problems, and teachers with their systems, are soon as old-fashioned as the pharmacopœia of Galen—look at Ibsen and the Germans—but the best plays of Ben Jonson and Molière can no more go out of fashion than the blackberries on the hedges."

The drama, Synge goes on to say, needs humour. That seems to be his quarrel with Ibsen. In the preface to *The Playboy*, Synge accuses the Norwegian playwright of "dealing with the reality of life in joyless and pallid words. On the stage one must have reality, and one must have joy; and that is why the intellectual modern drama has failed." In other words, Ibsen is too serious to satisfy a man like Synge. Such an objection which, incidentally, covers only part of the old master's literary achievement, is rather surprising on the part of the author of that poignant little tragedy, *Riders to the Sea*, published only a few years earlier. However, the arrogant note of Synge's attack is in itself an indirect proof of the fact that Ibsen occupied his thoughts more than he cared to admit, even to himself.

Although the Irish playwright stresses his belief that the drama must be humourous and full of laughter, he does not, I think, intend to suggest that these qualities would of themselves exclude the problem from the drama. The spirit of his own plays bears ample witness to the veracity of this statement. As a matter of fact, nearly all Synge's dramas offer an interesting problem presented in a form that agrees with the author's ideas of the humourous twist of mind and the poetic language of the Irish people.

In the Shadow of the Glen treats of a theme that is well known from many folktales: the old man who feigns death in order to put his young wife's fidelity to the test. The heroine of the play, Nora, has a feeling of being buried alive "in the shadow of the glen". Driven by her longing for a dimly-perceived horizon, the young woman forsakes her home out of her own free will. In other words, Nora prefers the hazards of the future to the kind of conjugal hide-and-seek that embitters her life.

Apart from the fact that the social background of the Irishman's play is utterly unlike that of the works of Ibsen, there is more than one connecting link between Synge's Nora and her Norwegian namesake in *A Doll's House*. Both plays introduce us to an ill-assorted couple whose union is spoilt by a bullying husband who does not allow his wife any kind of private life. Furthermore, it is worth observing that in either drama the final exposure of the heroine is followed by a great *scène à faire*, ending up with the woman banging the door on her husband. The inconclusive ending is another characteristic of the two plays under comparison. Both dramas close with a question-mark. If Synge had been asked, as Ibsen actually was, what became of Nora, he might well have subscribed to the old master's opinion that he regarded the future of the heroine as a side-issue.

Synge's Nora is also partly modelled on another character in Ibsen's famous gallery of remarkable women, i.e. Ellida Wangel in *The Lady from the Sea*. She, too, has sold herself to her husband. Her marriage, like Nora's, has proved a blind alley until one day both women are suddenly called back to real life by a stranger who is only too willing to open up the new horizon for which their pent-up souls are yearning.

True to his artistic creed, Synge carefully refrains from pointing

the moral of the play. Ibsen, on the other hand, for all his ambition to stand aloof from his characters, often suffers from an over-scrupulous conscience that accounts for the author's predilection for the literary sermon. In this respect there is a marked difference between the two writers. Synge, it is true, based his first play on a plot of native origin. But the genuine Irish twist of *In the Shadow of the Glen* must not blind us to the fact that the play gives clear indication of being a variation of the well-known theme of *A Doll's House*.

Synge's second drama, *Riders to the Sea*, deals with the most vital problem of the inhabitants of the Aran Islands, i.e. the inexorable forces of Nature. The subject was no doubt inspired by the Irishman's island experience. But the development of the main theme reveals Synge's indebtedness to the author of *The Lady from the Sea*. In this play, too, the incantatory power of the sea, which frightens and allures, repels and attracts its victims, is felt as a hidden undercurrent throughout the action. The evocative description of the sea and the perilous attraction it exerts upon the human soul is not, however, the only element in *Riders to the Sea* to invite comparison with the Ibsenian theatre. The suggestive vision of the horses that figure in the title of the play, as well as the interpretation of the dreadful sight as a portent of death, can be traced back to *Rosmersholm*. In this drama the "ghosts of the manor" are two white horses which appear whenever someone in the house of Rosmer is going to die. Similarly, Synge uses the *motif* of the horses to presage the catastrophe. In *Rosmersholm* there is furthermore the fatal mill-race which has all the grandeur of a natural force taking as its prey first one, then another member of the family, exactly as the sea does in *Riders to the Sea*. Most revealing, perhaps, is the scene in which the sinister truth comes home to the old mother in *Riders to the Sea* in precisely the same way as the shadow of the past begins to haunt Osvald's mother in the famous "ghost scene" that ends the first act of *Ghosts*.

The Tinker's Wedding is less rewarding from the point of view of Ibsenian influence. Yet, the very spirit of this play has something in common with the atmosphere of *The League of Youth*. Man is more or less at the mercy of chance. Mounted on Love's own merry-go-round, the persons of the play change partners as readily as a

pair of shoes. This general note of "match-making" that characterizes *The League of Youth* constitutes the nearest approach to Synge's wilful little farce. But on the whole, we had better speak only of possible impressions rather than of actual influence from Ibsen's drama.

The Well of the Saints is concerned with people who live in an imaginary world of illusions which they jealously guard against the intrusion of reality. The author stresses his belief that the "life-lie" is indispensable to man's happiness and that a sudden disenchantment must of necessity spell disaster. Thus Synge's drama has much in common with *The Wild Duck* whose main conflict centres on precisely the same problem. Both plays discuss the question of blindness, physical as well as spiritual. Like Hjalmar Ekdal, Synge's blind couple are born escapists who readily indulge in day-dreams which cannot possibly be reconciled to naked facts. When, through the gratuitous meddling of an outsider, the scales are removed from their eyes, Synge's beggars suffer the shock of being suddenly thrown out into a world without mercy. But before we lose sight of them they are once more comfortably ensconced in their imaginary kingdom. In other words, Synge arrives at exactly the same conclusion as Ibsen. Both writers consider illusion and self-deception to be far more important to the success of certain people than a disillusioned recognition of the truth. Says Relling in *The Wild Duck*: "Rob the average man of his life-lie, and you rob him of his happiness at the same stroke."

Synge's best known work, *The Playboy of the Western World*, is based on an actual occurrence recorded in his travel-sketches *The Aran Islands*. However, a close study of Synge's drama and its possible sources reveals the interesting fact that the hero of the play, Christy Mahon, has much in common with Ibsen's famous playboy, Peer Gynt, to say nothing of another day-dreamer, Hjalmar Ekdal in *The Wild Duck*. Both Peer and Christy are braggarts and boisterous good-for-nothings blessed with a vivid imagination and a youthful charm which make them irresistible to women. If a girl takes them seriously, they are at once ready to confess their love for her in the most highflown language. But a romantic strain and a habit of transforming the dreary truths of their everyday life into brilliant and colourful lies are by no means the only qualities

shared by Christy and Peer Gynt. At times both country lads are able to take a realistic view of life. Ibsen's hero, like Synge's, soon discovers that he can use his grip on other people to feather his own nest. Starting with two empty hands, Peer Gynt rises to become a ship-owner on a large scale. In a similar way Christy turns out to be something of a social-climber, marching straight into the heart of the heroine on his way to a carefree existence ever after.

Synge, it is true, was no "Playboy". Nor was Ibsen a Peer Gynt. Both dramatists were readers and observers, rather than men of action. But this would not prevent either of them from feeling akin to his hero. The point is, however, that the juxtaposition of the two plays clearly shows that the Irishman's treatment of the original story of *The Playboy* was conditioned by his impressions of *Peer Gynt*. In Ibsen's hero, with his sudden changes of mood, his chameleon-like accomodation to circumstances, as well as his excitability and incapacity to distinguish between right and wrong, fact and fancy, Synge must certainly have recognized the playboy of his own drama.

Thus we are once more reminded of the fact that the Irishman's denunciation of Ibsen does not entitle us to question *any* connection between the two writers. This view is confirmed by a recent statement by a well-known Norwegian authority on Ibsen. "The progeny of Peer Gynt and Hjalmar Ekdal", Bull writes, "is very numerous, and may often be found in precisely those plays whose authors have most ostentatiously proclaimed revolt against the Ibsenian theatre."[1]

Peer Gynt, however, is not the only Ibsen drama that may have influenced the author of *The Playboy*. The possessive manner in which Pegeen chooses Christy for her hero as well as her constant prompting of the young man to beat his own record, is, I think, strongly reminiscent of Hilde Wangel's bold game with Solness the Master Builder. Most striking, perhaps, is the parallel treatment of the final scene where the hero is suddenly dethroned leaving the young woman to pour out her lonely heart at the loss of her love. Hilde's almost maniacal cry "*My—my* Master Builder!" when the death of Solness puts her scheming to an abrupt end, is echoed

[1] Bull, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

exactly in the "wild lamentations" of Synge's heroine: "Oh, my grief, I've lost him surely. I've lost the only Playboy of the Western World."

Synge's last drama, *Deirdre of the Sorrows*, which he never quite finished, is of less interest in this connection. But the main conflict no doubt resembles that of *Love's Comedy*. Both plays treat of a love that demands all or nothing. There is also the same fear of the decay of love. Finally, Synge's heroine, like Ibsen's, is forced to admit that only by renouncing her love while it is still triumphant can she conquer time and immortalize her beautiful dream.

The present analysis seems to me to warrant the conclusion that there is an undeniable affinity between Ibsen's dramas and those of Synge, plainly indicated in the points of resemblance cited above. The juxtaposition of Synge's plays with those of Ibsen reveals an indubitable correlation of theme, character drawing and technique.

This similarity, however, does not in any way detract from the literary distinction of the Irish playwright. The proof of Synge's originality lies in the fact that the Ibsenian influence was never permitted to efface the genuine Irishness of his literary profile. That this is so, is best shown by the fact that so many scholars have been able to read Synge without observing his indebtedness to Ibsen.

On the other hand, Synge's criticism of Ibsen's drama makes it possible for the reader to discover the main points of divergence between the two dramatists, showing how Synge with his insistence on "joy" and "humour" finds matter for a completely amoral comedy, or tragi-comedy, in a subject already treated by Ibsen, the ethicist and moralist, as a tragedy. But the negative attitude displayed by Synge towards the great innovator of the modern drama can no longer conceal the fact that, generally speaking, the Irish playwright may be said to take interest in situations that involve the same questions as those dealt with by his Norwegian forerunner. He also maps out these problems in much the same way, and the conclusions, if any, are those already arrived at by Ibsen.

Thus Synge himself bears ample witness to the validity of his own artistic creed, as expressed in the preface to *The Playboy*: "All art is a collaboration."

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In 1917 Ernest A. Boyd wrote as follows: "There is felt to be an increasing need for a theatre in Ireland which will hold up to nature that half of the mirror which is not visible in the Irish National Theatre, where a too exclusive care for the folk-drama has resulted in giving a one-sided appearance to our dramatic activities."[1]

This is where Edward Martyn comes in as a champion of Ibsen and the continental drama. *The Heather Field* and *Maeve*, by far the most successful of Martyn's plays, represent a new departure in the history of Ireland's Literary Revival. For here we have a deliberate attempt to adopt some of the great Norwegian's fundamental principles for the creation of drama. Unlike most Ibsenites of the time, who saw only the social reformer, not the lyric visionary, the Irish dramatist instinctively sided with Ibsen the poet.

In *The Heather Field* and *Maeve*, where "human emotion is the whole of the play," Martyn did indeed approach the high mountains of his great master. But his imagination never soared to such heights in any of the remaining plays which are all marked by a gradual decline. Though less convincing from the point of view of literary workmanship, these plays are nevertheless of great interest to the scholar as an evidence of Martyn's dogged fight for an Irish drama independent of the folk-play.

With the passing of the years, however, Martyn's drama takes on a new aspect. Although still faithful to Ibsen, the Irish playwright tends to abandon his early highly poetic themes in order to concentrate his efforts on various topics of everyday life. *The Tale of a Town*, for instance, is a case in point. The play, it is true, falls flat by the side of *An Enemy of the People* that inspired it. Yet Martyn's drama is not dwarfed into insignificance, for here again the author was breaking fresh ground.

Even in plays with a legendary background, such as *Maeve* and *An Enchanted Sea*, the native element of the story cannot conceal the fact that the strains were caught up from Ibsen who left his mark not only on the main conflict and on some of the leading characters but also on the technique of the Irishman's drama.

It is characteristic of Martyn's way of working that most of his plays include elements from more than one of Ibsen's works.

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[1] Boyd, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

Grangecolman forms no exception to the rule. The heroine of the drama is clearly modelled on Hedda Gabler, whereas the idea of making a haunted old country-house the centre of the action may be traced back to *Ghosts* and *Rosmersholm*. Looking for new directions, the Irish dramatist once more sought and found inspiration in Ibsen. *Grangecolman* is not a great play. But it holds its own by the side of Martyn's other plays as an interesting attempt to enrich the repertory of the contemporary Irish stage.

Martyn's indebtedness to Ibsen does not, however, exclude certain points of divergence between the two dramatists. Some of these are undoubtedly due to a fundamental difference of character and temperament. Unlike Ibsen, the Irish playwright does not want to raise any problems or question current morality. Dramatic didacticism was not for him.[1] This is quite in keeping with the author's religious considerations which made him shun the daring problems that Ibsen tackled in play after play. It is, I think, something of a paradox that Martyn, the devout Catholic, should have found his way to Ibsen, the Protestant. The author of *Ave* was right—"the drama brings strange fowls to roost".

Equally conspicuous is the Irishman's lack of humour, as well as his negative attitude to nearly all the women of his plays, with Maeve as the one notable exception.

Then there is Martyn's extreme satire. More often than not the author overshoots the mark simply because he does not know how to sugar his pill. In *The Tale of a Town*, for instance, almost every Irishman cuts a poor figure and all the Englishmen are depicted as so many monsters. Where Ibsen mixes his scorn with sympathy and pity for humankind, as well as with subtle humour, the Irish dramatist is so blinded by his indignation that his satirical plays leave room for little else but the author's mockery and contempt.

Last but not least there are, of course, certain far-reaching differences between the two dramatists from the point of view of literary workmanship. After all it is only natural that Martyn's artistic limitations, such as faulty individualization and stilted dialogue, should become accentuated in the presence of the Norwegian giant.

[1] Although primarily a great poet and artist, Ibsen did raise his forefinger from time to time to point the moral of the play. Suffice it to mention *The Wild Duck*, generally considered to be his masterpiece.

But this is not the point. Many playwrights are dwarfed by Ibsen. The point is that the juxtaposition of Martyn's plays with those of his great forerunner reveals a remarkable correspondence of theme, character drawing, setting and technique. It is to the Irishman's credit that at least two of his plays compare favourably even with the finest works of Ibsen.

In an attempt to estimate the true significance of Edward Martyn's contribution to the Irish drama, one may say that his early plays are object lessons of what new conquests might be made within the world of the poetic drama thanks to the pioneering work of the Norwegian master-builder.

The Heather Field and some of the plays that were to follow no doubt formed a striking contrast to the uniform productions of the contemporary Irish stage. They showed the possibilities of a new kind of drama, a drama both Irish and cosmopolitan. Thus Martyn's plays, as well as the European repertory of his own theatre, set an example that paved the way for the continental drama.

"Edward Martyn and J. M. Synge," a contemporary critic writes, "have a very special claim to Ireland's gratitude and admiration. Without Edward Martyn, the modern Irish drama might never have been born. Without Synge, it would have died in early childhood. In congratulating the Abbey on its coming of age, let Irishmen pay tribute to the memory of Edward Martyn—a man of ideas, a man of courage, and a man who loved his people and his country well."[1]

[1] Quoted Denis Gwynn, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

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HENRIK IBSEN

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B.

EDWARD MARTYN

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The Path of Logic

[1] In a letter of December 8, 1959, Professor Stephen P. Ryan, who owns the unique MS., kindly informs the present writer that *The Privilege of Place*, *The Path of Logic* and *The Official's Son* are one and the same play. It was produced by Martyn's Irish Theatre in November, 1915, under the title *The Privilege of Place*.

The Official's Son
Gifford of Knockroe[1]
Regina Eyre[2]

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[1] In the same letter Professor Ryan points out that "no mss of *Gifford of Knockroe* has turned up, and I presume it was lost with the other Martyn papers when the Carmelite priory in London was destroyed by bombing in 1941". For an abortive attempt to trace the missing papers, see Sister Marie-Thérèse Courtney, *Edward Martyn and the Irish Theatre* (New York 1956), Preface and Appendix A.

[2] This play was Edward Martyn's last contribution to the Dublin stage. It was performed by the Irish Theatre in April, 1919. (See Stephen P. Ryan, "Edward Martyn's Last Play" in *Studies*, Summer 1958.)

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